BARTOQUE AND ROCOCO

The Baroque style gained sway in Italy in the first half of the 17th century and spread throughout Europe and Latin America, with local variations, until the mid-18th century. The term was first applied to artworks suggesting the bizarre, asymmetrical, or irregular, beginning about 1730. The etymology has been much debated, but the word “Baroque” probably comes from the Portuguese adjective *barrueca*, which describes an irregularly formed pearl.

As has happened with other art styles, by the time the characteristics of Baroque were described, during the Neoclassical era in the second half of the 18th century, its aesthetic ideals were already outdated. Accordingly, the term was used in a pejorative sense to designate a capricious art, a bad taste that did not respect the Classical rules and was thus antithetical to the ideals of Neoclassicism. Today, Baroque has been reappraised on the basis of thorough scholarly studies and is seen in its proper historical and artistic context.

Baroque art was born in Rome in the early 17th century when the Roman Catholic Church was past its Counter-Reformation phase. The papal state, reaffirming its authority as a political and religious power, had decided that art was to be a principal means of persuading and involving believers. The result was a new, prestigious recognition of the artist’s role and a notion of art as a rhetorical instrument. In fact, Baroque art, like 17th-century poetry, was a rhetorical art par excellence. It used metaphors, allegories, and technical and stylistic devices to captivate and convince the viewer. It no longer sought to edify and instruct the faithful, but to involve them by appealing to the senses, rather than the intellect. This does not mean that Baroque artists were not educated and erudite. To the contrary, underlying the great fascination of their works were careful, scientific studies of which the viewer was not supposed to be aware. Gianlorenzo Bernini’s Baldacchino (1623–34) and colonnade (1656–67) at St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome were the outcome of long, in-depth technical, architectonic, and scenographic studies intended to make them seem perfectly natural and harmonious in their settings despite their enormous dimensions. In fact, optical illusion, which requires scientific study by the artist and gives the observer immediate enjoyment, was one of Baroque’s favored means of expression.

Furthering this aspiration to involve the faithful emotionally and in parallel with the fledgling discipline of Christian archaeology—which sought to recover the history, artistic documents, relics, and monuments of early Christianity—Baroque iconography gave preference to the glories of saints and martyrs and their divine ecstasies and mystical visions. It was also a response to Protestant criticism, in that it reaffirmed the legitimacy of the Roman Catholic Church’s use of images and her continuity with the early Christian Church. In her aspiration to represent the divine and the supernatural, the Church opened the way to the imagination and eventually arrived at a sumptuous and magniloquent self-celebration that accurately reflected the image of *Ecclesia Triumphans* (Church Triumphant) that the papacy wished to hand down.

Baroque art was thus born in Rome in the context just described, but spread fast and wide across Europe and Latin America, often following the routes taken by the Jesuit order. In France and many other countries, the style was related to the monarchy, rather than the papacy, but some of its basic guidelines remained unaltered. In addition, in this case Baroque reaffirmed art’s rhetorical power and its power of persuasion even when it served different ideals.

The new role of art as a rhetorical instrument stimulated sculptors to reach a very high level of technical skill and master a variety of materials and working methods. Many Baroque sculptors knew how to work marble, bronze, stucco, and papier mâché, and they worked simultaneously on widely differing commissions: restoring ancient works and designing and executing procession floats, monuments, bronzes, and table decorations.

Baroque sculpture had an undisputed protagonist: Gianlorenzo Bernini. In his *Apollo and Daphne* (1622–24) and *David* (1623) in the Galleria Borghese in Rome, and in the Throne of St. Peter (1656–66) in St. Peter’s Basilica, Bernini established Baroque’s most successful and typical themes. Because the figures’ movements were perceived as natural and they seemed to have been captured in a fleeting moment, his sculptures established a new relationship with the viewer.

Bernini drew on a variety of models ranging from contemporary and Renaissance painting to Roman and Hellenistic sculpture, and he had the extraordinary technical skill needed to put in practice his new way of conceiving sculpture in pictorial terms. Together with his familiarity with different techniques and materials, he was able to create works in which painting, sculpture in the round, bas-relief, and decoration were joined in a *mirabile composto*, a wondrous compound.

A few sculptors working in Rome in the early 17th century offered cues to the new Baroque generation. Among them were Nicolas Cordier, from Lorraine, and the Venetian Camillo Mariani. Cordier’s virtuosity and his fine capacity for penetration in portraits were...
suggestive for Baroque artists like Giuliano Finelli and Domenico Fancelli. Mariani contributed to the success of a Venetian taste that began to interest sculptors and painters working in Rome around 1620. In sculpture, this meant opening to pictorial rhythms and seeking to create light effects on the forms—suggestions that were taken up by the Tuscans Pietro Bernini and Francesco Mochi.

Pietro Bernini’s culture, his acceptance of Mariani’s luminist novelties, and his study of Hellenistic and Roman models were starting points for his son Gianlorenzo. Mochi was a different, more complex figure. His first masterpiece was the Orvieto Annunciation (1603–09), a group of two freestanding statues linked together by a studied light effect. Mariani’s influence is evident in the transparent flesh and in the search for soft light effects, whereas his Mannerist culture is expressed in stylistic and technical refinements already understood in a new way, although perhaps not yet truly Baroque.

The St. Veronica (1629–40) Mochi carved for one of the four piers in St. Peter’s Basilica is closer to the new style. The will to challenge the solidity of marble and draw from it light, thin drapery suspended in the air reveals Mariani’s influence, but the windswept drapery is an altogether new motif: St. Veronica is the only one among the four statues of the crossing who seems about to invade the viewer’s space. Precisely because of her unrestrained movement and windswept drapery, Bernini seems not to have liked the St. Veronica, which goes to show how artistic enterprises based on similar research but different aesthetic ideals and senses of decorum could coexist in what we generically call Baroque.

Within the vast Baroque movement, it is possible to identify different trends, such as the Baroque Classicism that saw particular success in France but had its two most celebrated practitioners, François du Quesnoy and Alessandro Algardi, in Rome. Both worked with or alongside Bernini but did not let themselves be much influenced by him. Like Andrea Sacchi and Nicolas Poussin, they were interested in a different—more lyrical, meditated, and calm—way of telling stories. Among other contributions, Algardi was the first to investigate the potential of relief (such as Pope Leo Driving Attila from Rome [1646–53] in St. Peter’s Basilica), a genre that may not have satisfied Bernini because of “his desire for spatial interpenetration between sculpture and reality” (see Wittkower, 1958). After Algardi set an example, relief enjoyed great success and was often preferred to painting. In general, during the Baroque age sculpture was held in very high consideration, often higher than paintings and even higher than in Michelangelo’s day.

One of Bernini’s most talented pupils was Finelli, who soon moved to Naples and, together with Cosimo Fanzago, inaugurated the Baroque season in that city. After the first generation, the principal sculptors working in Rome during the 1650s were Ercole Ferrata, his pupil Melchiorre Caffà, Antonio Raggi, and Domenico Guidi. Raggi quickly assimilated Bernini’s teachings, especially his late, more fervent and spiritual style, whereas Ferrata preferred the lyrical Classicism of Algardi.

Caffà and Guidi showed, in different ways, the first signs of the slow decline of the most genuine Baroque ideals. In the works of Guidi, the academic manner undermined the rhetorical force of the first Baroque artists. Caffà opened the way to a sweeter, more sentimental sculpture, one capable of new subtleties destined to find full expression in the 18th century. These and other Baroque sculptors and painters went to work outside Rome, but only toward the end of the 17th century could Bologna, Genoa, Florence, and Venice vaunt their own schools of Baroque sculpture.
Rome’s artistic supremacy waned toward the end of the century when the papal state began losing authority in the new balance of European political power, and France affirmed its cultural power. The French Academy was established in Rome in 1666, and French sculptors flocked to it. Many participated in major Roman enterprises. Pierre Legros and Pierre-Étienne Monnot collaborated with Camillo Rusconi on the Apostles for the Basilica of San Giovanni in Laterano, Rome, and with Jean-Baptiste Théodon, Legros, and others on the altar of St. Ignatius at the Church of the Gesù, Rome. Their style, like that of the Italians working in the early 18th century, is generally called Late Baroque: the sense of dramatic unity was supplanted by a more verbose and redundant language where the dynamism of Bernini and his most faithful followers was cooled by a graceful Classicism. French gracefulness filtered into the work of Filippo della Valle, one of the last representatives of Italian Baroque, which was already evolving into the new Rococo ideas. Della Valle, who had trained with Giovanni Battista Foggini in Florence and Rusconi in Rome, developed an elegant, sophisticated language that was partial to the sentimental and extremely graceful. If one wishes to speak of what was no more than a bland Rococo trend within Roman sculpture, Della Valle, Pietro Bracci, and a few others would have to be mentioned. The last important collective enterprise was the Trevi Fountain (mid 18th century), where late Baroque and a timid Rococo merge in the huge rocaille shell and in Bracci’s graceful Neptune (1722).

To see more complete expressions of Rococo, one must leave Italy for other countries. France had a florid Baroque season that was perhaps best defined by the work of François Girardon, Antoine Coysevox, and Pierre Puget. Their work depended closely on the royal court’s choices. Girardon, who produced a sophisticated, Classicist Baroque, was preferred over Coysevox for nearly the entire 17th century. Protected by important people at court, he received the most prestigious commissions in Paris and at Versailles. Coysevox, who worked in a more dynamic and daring sculptural style, managed to gain sway only toward the end of the century. His decorations, like the plaster relief of The Triumph of Louis XIV (1681–83) in the Château de Versailles, and his busts, which owed much to the “speaking” portraiture conceived by Bernini, are among the most daring specimens of French Baroque. At the same time that Coysevox’s inventiveness was beginning to be appreciated, Puget managed to get himself called to court. Puget, more than any of the other French sculptors, had assimilated the Italian style. He had trained in Rome and Florence with the painter Pietro da Cortona, with whom he collaborated at Palazzo Pitti (1643), and in 1666 he opened a shop in Genoa. There he met Filippo Parodi, a talented pupil of Bernini’s, and left what was perhaps his most fascinating work, a Saint Sebastian (1664–68), which was inspired by Bernini’s Daniel of 1655–60 in the Church of Santa Maria di Carignano. Even his late works, such as Milo of Croton (ca. 1671–82) and Alexander and Diogenes (1670–89), show frequent borrowings from Bernini and Algardi transfigured in an incisive style rich in dynamism and pathos.

Knowledge of the great Roman and French Baroque artists also underlies the art of the first Baroque German sculptors, such as Matthias Rauchmiller, but outstanding artists such as the Germans Balthasar Permoser and Andreas Schlutter and the Austrian Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlach did not appear until the 1680s and 1690s. Permoser had been in Rome, Florence, and Venice, and his sculptures for the altar in the old Dresden court show how he had assimilated Bernini’s teachings.

Fischer von Erlach studied for 15 years in Rome, where he came in contact with important figures such as Bernini, Carlo Fontana, and the critic Bellori. He served as court architect in Vienna and wrote a history of architecture. The Plague (or Trinity) Column (1682–94; Vienna) reveals his profound culture and his bent for a sumptuous and sophisticated Baroque style close to Rococo. Schlutter, the court sculptor in Berlin, had likewise studied in Italy. His art combined his studies of the Italian sculptors (Mochi, Bernini, and Algardi) and the French (Coysevox) with a great capacity for synthesis, as can be seen in the equestrian monument to Frederick Wilhelm (1697–98; Berlin), where the realism and the sentimental tone proper to the German tradition are skillfully harmonized with the foreign models.

In England the new style was heralded by Nicholas Stone, who rose to become the leading mason-sculptor about 1625. Initially intrigued by the style of the Fontainebleau school, then studying the ancient works present after 1630 in Charles I’s collection, Stone gradually succeeded in renewing the models of local tradition and opened the way to new artistic endeavors. His son John followed in his footsteps, and one of the assistants in John’s shop was the Danish sculptor Caius Gabriel Cibber, who moved to England before 1660. In his youth Cibber had traveled in Italy, and his knowledge of Italian Mannerist and Baroque sculpture shows up in his most important English works, such as the allegorical bas-relief on the 1673–75 Monument to the Great Fire of London (also known as Charles II Coming to the Assistance of the City) and the free-standing tomb of Thomas Sackville (1677). In the latter, the life-size figures of the parents mourning the deceased direct the viewer’s eye toward the center of the monument with a device that was typically Ba-
roque but exactly the opposite of the Bernini school’s tendency to make sculptures explode into space. The Dutch part of Cibber’s background and his appreciation of Mannerist sculpture prevented him from adhering to the triumphant rhetoric of Bernini-style Baroque, but his English contemporary John Bushnell flaunted it by adopting the most striking but superficial aspects of Bernini’s teaching. The Mocenigo monument (ca. 1660–63) testifies to Bushnell’s sojourn in Italy, but almost certainly he also traveled to Rome, because his style—as exemplified in the monument to John, Viscount Mordaunt of Avalon (1675), and the monument to William Ashburnham and his wife (1675)—reveals a good knowledge of Roman Baroque art. However one may judge Bushnell’s artistic results, his importance in the history of English sculpture was fundamental, for “he was the first English artist to show any knowledge of Baroque sculpture” (see Whinney 1988).

The Spanish Baroque expressed a more popular and genuine religious devotion. In Spain, the new style was independent enough of Italian art to create some of its own characteristics: pasos, which are statues devoted to stories from the Passion and designed to be carried in procession; the retablo, which is a large, architectural panel divided into compartments; and the transparente, which is a tabernacle containing the host.

The new style appeared in the first half of the 17th century in painted wooden sculptures carved by Gregorio Fernández in Castille, Juan Martínez Montañés in Seville, and Alonso Cano in Granada. Starting from the Italian Mannerist tradition known in Spain from the works of Pompeo Leoni and Pietro Torrigiani, Fernández and Montañés opted in the second decade for a more passionate and complex modeling of volumes and a more marked chromatism that augmented the expressive force of their works. Fernández developed a high-level style that was extremely incisive and expressive, rich in pathos and overflowing with emotion, as in his Pietà (1616; Museo Nacional de Escultura, Valladolid). Montañés’s style was more sober and elegant, and his emotion less flaunted, although he managed equally high dramatic effects, as in the Santiponce retable (1609; Monastery of Sant’Isidoro del Campo, Seville). Although Montañés had been in contact with Velázquez and Pacheco, Alonso Cano had been the latter’s pupil and was a painter and architect as well as a sculptor. His retable in the Lebrija Church (1629–31; Seville) displayed an original style characterized by delicate idealization, as far from Fernández’s realism as from Montañés’s dramatic effects. His wooden figures are painted in refined and precious colors and often appear composed and lost in thought. These features are accentuated in his last, very sweet creations, the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception (1655–56; Granada Cathedral) and the St. Diego de Alcalá (ca. 1653–57; Palace of Charles V, Granada). Cano’s elegant example was to be developed in the second half of the century by his pupils Pedro de Mena and José de Mora.

Starting in the mid 17th century with the arrival of the Bourbons, the artistic and cultural multicentrism characteristic of early Spanish Baroque was put to a difficult test. The foundation of the Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando in Madrid encouraged the formation of a new generation of artists but had repercussions on workshops in the provinces. Two schools thus developed: one continued the tradition of polychrome wooden sculpture, and the other engendered an official art that preferred marble.

At around this time the celebrated Churrigueras family of sculptors and architects came to the fore. Working in Salamanca and Madrid, they created a style of their own in which decorative elements covered all the surfaces. The wooden altar of St. Eustace (1693–96; Jesuit Church, Salamanca) is one of the masterpieces that reveal a knowledge of Bernini motifs, which the Churriguera family interpreted in the exuberant plateresque style of decoration. So great was their fame that it gave rise to a new word, churriguerismo, designating the decoratively rich work typical of the Spanish Baroque.

Narciso Tom was the artist who reached the peak of Spanish ornamental exuberance in the Transparente of the Cathedral of Toledo (1732). The work was designed to enable the congregation to see inside the tabernacle of the host by surreal lighting obtained by cutting a hole in the ceiling of the deambulatory so that the sun’s rays could penetrate from above. The host was framed by a cohort of angels flanked by decorated columns and surmounted by a sculptural group of the Last Supper and the Ascension of the Virgin. The perfect harmony and blending of architecture, sculpture, and painting in an ensemble of curved and wavy lines, polychromy, and the use of different materials heightened the scenographic effect of this extraordinary work, which owes much to Bernini’s devices but also reveals new ideas that came to be prized in the Rococo style.

In Spain in the late 17th and early 18th century, the influence of the Italian tradition was joined by the new Francophile taste imported by the Bourbons. Many French sculptors, including Rene Frémín (a pupil of Girardon), Jean Thierry (a pupil of Coysevox), and Jacques Bousseau, were brought in to work on the royal residence of Sant’Ildefonso, known as the Granja. The relationship between garden and palace, sculpture and architecture, was patterned closely on the Versailles model; the interior is sumptuously decorated and the garden is dotted with mythological statues and
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fountains, giving rise to a complex in which Baroque and Rococo were already cohabiting.

In the meantime, Versailles, which had subscribed to Girardon’s elegant Classicism and then to Couisnevox’s lively Baroque, gave birth to the new Rococo style. Just as Baroque was the style of the Roman Catholic Church in the 17th century, Rococo was the style of the French court in the 18th century. Restorations and new projects at Versailles came at the dawn of this new climate, which found its first expression in Pierre Lepautre’s interior decorations.

Like Baroque, the term Rococo was coined in a pejorative sense during the Neoclassical era. It derives from the French rocaille, a type of garden and grotto decoration featuring a shell motif. Rococo was considered a late degeneration of Baroque, but it was a style in its own right with its own identifiable characteristics. Many Late Baroque motifs flowed into Rococo, but they were reinterpreted in a different way. Often the two styles coexisted in a single architectural complex, as in the Spanish example of Granja, or contaminated each other, especially in places where the Baroque was assimilated more slowly.

The new Rococo sensibility materialized first in French architecture (palaces and private residences) but found its most felicitous expression in internal decoration and gave new importance to the “minor” arts (porcelain, silver, furniture, and mirrors). It retained the Baroque rhetorical aspect of enjoyment and illusion, accentuating the importance of ornament, gracefulness, and elegance. Sculpture acquired a special role. Except for examples such as Guillaume I Coustou’s Horses Restrained by Grooms (1739–45; Musée du Louvre, Paris) and Robert Le Lorrain’s great relief for the Hôtel de Rohan (1740), large dimensions were either banned or reserved for parks and fountains.

Rococo preferred different materials for different uses: lead for fountain sculptures (because with water its delicate shine creates precious light effects); porcelain, Chinese lacquer, and precious materials for small sculptures (because they are glossy, fragile, and rich in light); and stucco for interior decoration (because its softness and ductility could well express the gracefulness dear to Rococo). Porcelain was used for small objects that formed a separate genre of knickknacks with no meaning other than the sentimental.

The best examples of Rococo were created during the 1730s in France: the Adam Brothers’ decoration of the Hôtel Soubise in Paris, the decoration of the anteroom in the Hôtel de Matignon, and the red drawing room in the Hôtel de Roquelaure. All evince the new absolute importance given to the decorative element, which acquired a life of its own no longer subordinated to the architecture.

The new French taste quickly spread to foreign lands. The first and most original response came from the southern German-speaking countries. The external and internal parts of the castle of Nymphenburg (Munich) show this earliest assimilation starting in the 1730s. Later but equally significant is the palace of Wurzburg decorated by Antonio Bossi. Bossi transposed his clear debt to Bernini into a light and graceful style and played with the ductility of stucco to express the amiable gaiety, surprise, and delicate irony that characterize Rococo.

Among the monumental sculptures, one must note Joseph Anton Feuchtmayer and Johan Georg Ublhör’s Gnadenaltar at the center of the church in Vierzehnheiligen, Bavaria. This is a sort of votive altar on which 11 statues of saints are arranged around a canopy. Made entirely of stucco and following curved lines and inclined planes, the monument flaunts its precarious equilibrium as if it had won a challenge to copy a refined product of the goldsmith’s art on the monumental scale.

In garden sculpture, the transition to Rococo can be seen in the works of Ferdinand Tietz for the park at Veitschochheim. Here monumental Baroque statues appear disguised as playful stage actors who cross the garden dancing and winking at the visitor. From Ba-
variations seem outdated.

Conversely, Italy participated in the new movement with works of good quality, although episodic or individual. One practitioner was the virtuoso stucco craftsman Giacomo Serpotta, who worked in Sicily in the early 18th century and was famous for his inventive genius and the rich ornamental exuberance of his decorations (1609–1707; Oratory of St. Lawrence). On the whole, however, the Late Baroque style was still vital enough in Italy to slow the progress of the new style.

In England, too, the Rococo gained ground slowly. John Michael Rysbrack, for one, occasionally used figurative solutions close to the Rococo aesthetic ideals, as in his statues of Peter Paul Rubens (1743) and Hercules (1744; Stourhead, Wiltshire), but most of his works were characterized by a solemn and magniloquent Classical language.

It was a French artist, Louis François Roubiliac, who opened England’s Rococo season. Starting with his earliest works—the statue of George Frideric Handel (1738; Victoria and Albert Museum, London), the busts of William Hogarth (1740; National Portrait Gallery, London) and Alexander Pope (1741; private collection)—Roubiliac fine-tuned the fundamental features of a new conception, intimate and penetrating, of portraiture. He captures his subjects in a fleeting moment—lost in their thoughts, their poses informal and perfectly natural—and that is how he offers them to the public eye. The same unaffected narrative vein reappears in Roubiliac’s principal funerary monuments, to the Second Duke of Argyll (1745–49; Westminster Abbey, London), the Duchess of Montagu (1754?; Warkton, Northamptonshire), and Mr. and Mrs. Nightingale (1758–61; Westminster Abbey, London). These works show that Roubiliac had an extensive knowledge of Bernini and the Roman Baroque (he had visited Rome in 1752), but also that his real interest lay in a more graceful and elegant language that could mitigate the force and the rhetorical emphasis of the Italian models. Roubiliac’s garland-bearing putti and motifs mitigate the force and the rhetorical emphasis of the Italian models. Roubiliac’s garland-bearing putti and motifs mitigate the force and the rhetorical emphasis of the Italian models. Roubiliac’s garland-bearing putti and motifs mitigate the force and the rhetorical emphasis of the Italian models. Roubiliac’s garland-bearing putti and motifs mitigate the force and the rhetorical emphasis of the Italian models. Roubiliac’s garland-bearing putti and motifs mitigate the force and the rhetorical emphasis of the Italian models. Roubiliac’s garland-bearing putti and motifs mitigate the force and the rhetorical emphasis of the Italian models. 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