

**RESPONSE QUESTION 1/2: Compare these two paintings in a few sentences.**



Both of these paintings show women, but in very different ways. Both are central and surrounded by two other people, or groups of people. Both are in motion. But Venus is nude, while the woman in *The Swing* is clothed. In *The Birth of Venus* the other people rush to clothe her and she covers herself, recalling the *venus pudica* pose of antiquity. She stands in *contrapposto*. In the *The Swing*, the woman opens her legs, allowing a hidden man to see up her dress. There is a much more sexual tone to *The Swing* than *The Birth of Venus*. There is also much more open space in Botticelli's painting, while Fragonard's is filled with elaborate details, in keeping with Rococo trends.

**Student Questions**

**So, were people back in the day very strict about women's rights, or did they keep quiet and let men do as they pleased?**

Women's rights wasn't a concept at the time, like it is today. Feminism, as we know it today, only really began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and continues through today. Women didn't have the right to vote in France until 1944. France wasn't a democracy during the Rococo but even in the US, which was, women didn't have the right to vote until 1920. This doesn't mean that certain people didn't support women's rights or fight for them, but it wasn't a mass movement in the Rococo period. Women were expected to keep homes and act "appropriately," and defer to their husbands.

**Could it be that artists began to include themselves in the paintings as a sign of them rising in social status?**

Absolutely. Artists often show off. Including a portrait of themselves is like a visual signature.

**Why was portraiture considered more appropriate for female artist? During this time period, is this the only art that female artists were allowed to create?**

Portraiture was more appropriate for female artists in part because the sitters were clothed. Academic training in art involved painting from live, nude models, which was not allowed for women. For a woman to be a professional painter at all was extremely unusual in this time.

**Are there any limits when it comes Rococo style in art?**

Rococo art is quite naturalistic and doesn't push social norms. For example, you're unlikely to find depictions of the lower classes, or any sort of suffering or poverty.

**Do seashells have symbolic meaning in Rococo art? Are there any distinct shades of colors used in Rococo art?**

Rococo art is interested in nature, so a lot of its elements can be found in nature, like the seashell. Seashells were also associated with femininity, and could represent birth and resurrection, so could be used symbolically.

Colors in Rococo art tend to be pastels.