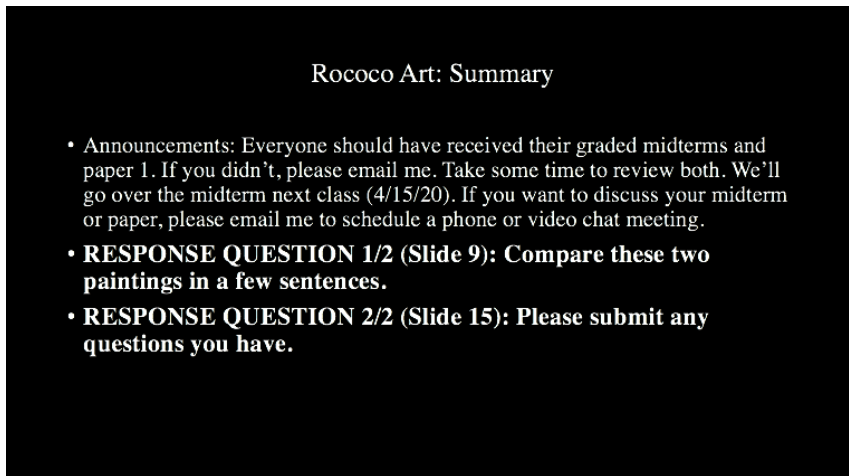


4/13/20: Rococo

Responses due 4/14/20 at 9:30 AM by email ([anna.carroll@brooklyn.cuny.edu](mailto:anna.carroll@brooklyn.cuny.edu))

Slide 1: Summary



Rococo Art: Summary

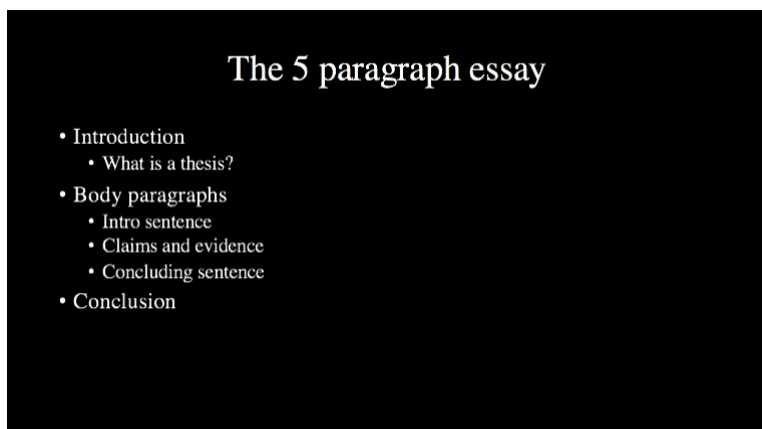
- Announcements: Everyone should have received their graded midterms and paper 1. If you didn't, please email me. Take some time to review both. We'll go over the midterm next class (4/15/20). If you want to discuss your midterm or paper, please email me to schedule a phone or video chat meeting.
- **RESPONSE QUESTION 1/2 (Slide 9): Compare these two paintings in a few sentences.**
- **RESPONSE QUESTION 2/2 (Slide 15): Please submit any questions you have.**

Announcements: Everyone should have received their graded midterms and paper 1. If you didn't, please email me. Take some time to review both. We'll go over the midterm next class (4/15/20). If you want to discuss your midterm or paper, please email me to schedule a phone or video chat meeting.

**RESPONSE QUESTION 1/2 (Slide 9): Compare these two paintings in a few sentences.**

**RESPONSE QUESTION 2/2 (Slide 15): Please submit any questions you have.**

Slide 2



The 5 paragraph essay

- Introduction
  - What is a thesis?
- Body paragraphs
  - Intro sentence
  - Claims and evidence
  - Concluding sentence
- Conclusion

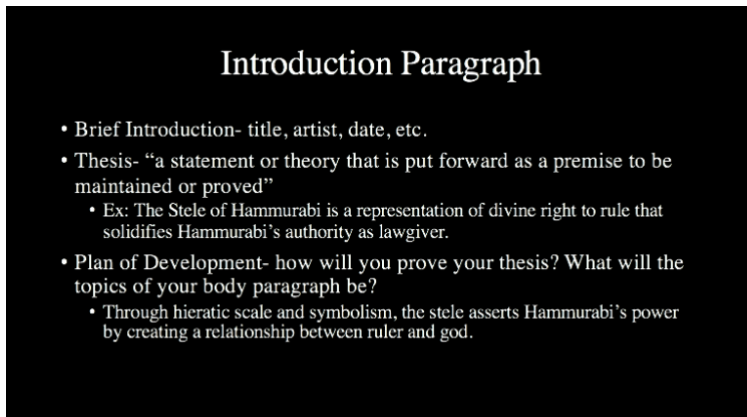
Before looking at Rococo Art, we're going to review essay writing. **REMINDER: Paper 2 is due on May 4th. Detailed instructions are on the course website.**

We're going to go over the general format of the 5-paragraph essay. Essays do not need to be 5 paragraphs, but this is a general and reliable structure for essay writing. It consists of an introduction paragraph, 3 body paragraphs, and a conclusion paragraph. Each paragraph is about

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3-7 sentences. There is no set rule for how long paragraphs should be, but if you're only writing one sentence, it's very unlikely you'll be saying enough to get your point across. If you're writing a full page for one paragraph, that's too much. A paragraph that is a page long is very difficult to follow, so your argument is going to be less convincing.

Slide 3



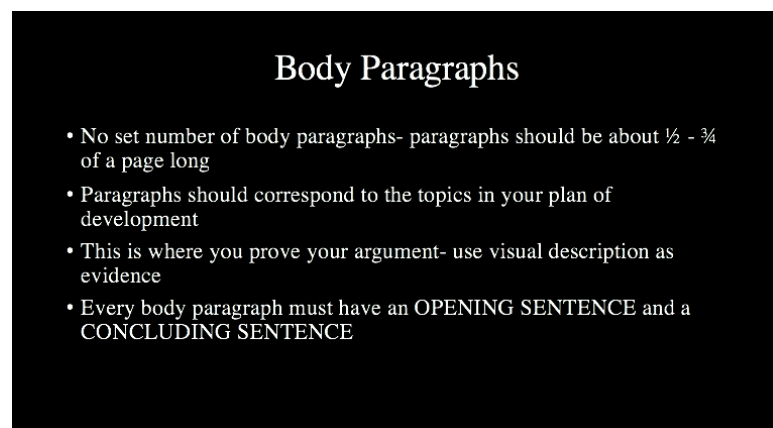
**Introduction Paragraph**

- Brief Introduction- title, artist, date, etc.
- Thesis- "a statement or theory that is put forward as a premise to be maintained or proved"
  - Ex: The Stele of Hammurabi is a representation of divine right to rule that solidifies Hammurabi's authority as lawgiver.
- Plan of Development- how will you prove your thesis? What will the topics of your body paragraph be?
  - Through hieratic scale and symbolism, the stele asserts Hammurabi's power by creating a relationship between ruler and god.

An introduction should have a brief overview of your work of art- the title, date, etc.. Most importantly, an introduction paragraph **MUST** have a **thesis**. A thesis tells us what you're going to argue. For example, a thesis about the Stele of Hammurabi could be "The Stele of Hammurabi is a representation of divine right to rule that solidifies Hammurabi's authority as lawgiver." Notice my thesis tells you what I'm going to argue, without telling you how I'm going to prove it or what evidence I'll use. I give you this information in a **plan of development**, which says how the thesis will be proven. For example, my plan of development might be "Through hieratic scale and symbolism, the stele asserts Hammurabi's power by creating a relationship between ruler and god."

The plan of development tells your reader what your body paragraphs will be about. In this essay, I'm going to have 2 sections- one about hieratic scale and one about symbolism. I may have 2 body paragraphs, one for each, or perhaps I'll have three- one for hieratic scale and two for symbolism. This is the sort of thing that depends on how much evidence I have.

Slide 4



**Body Paragraphs**

- No set number of body paragraphs- paragraphs should be about  $\frac{1}{2}$  -  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a page long
- Paragraphs should correspond to the topics in your plan of development
- This is where you prove your argument- use visual description as evidence
- Every body paragraph must have an **OPENING SENTENCE** and a **CONCLUDING SENTENCE**

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Body paragraphs are where you prove your argument by citing evidence and using formal analysis.

### Slide 5

#### Example Body Paragraph

- Hammurabi's power is underscored by hieratic scale, which positions him as close to the god, but not more important than the deity.
- Description
- Hammurabi's proximity to the divine suggests divine backing, while his small size in comparison to Shamash shows that Hammurabi is a pious ruler, who does not place himself above the divine.

Here is an example outline for a body paragraph. It should have an introduction sentence, then evidence and description, and then a concluding sentence that relates that paragraph back to your thesis.

Intro sentence: Hammurabi's power is underscored by hieratic scale, which positions him as close to the god, but not more important than the deity.

Description and evidence.

Concluding sentence: Hammurabi's proximity to the divine suggests divine backing, while his small size in comparison to Shamash shows that Hammurabi is a pious ruler, who does not place himself above the divine.

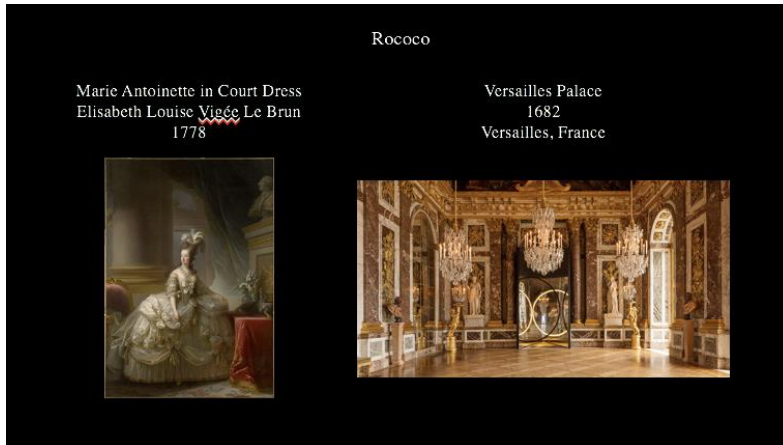
### Slide 6

#### Concluding Paragraph

- Restate your thesis, in different words
- Summarize your argument
- State the implications of your argument- why does what you have argued matter?

In your concluding paragraph you should restate your thesis in different words and summarize the argument. The best concluding paragraph will tell us the implications of your argument.

Slide 7

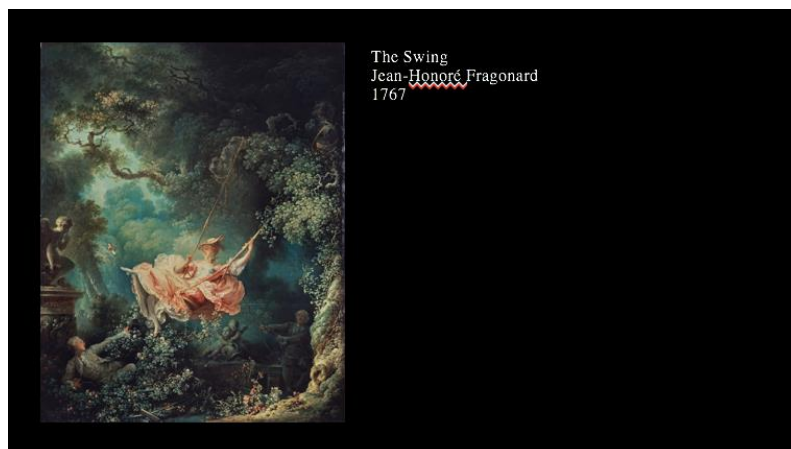


Let's look now at Rococo art. What is the "Rococo"? Rococo refers to a period in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, primarily in France, where the aristocracy became extremely wealthy and extremely powerful. The **aristocracy** is a social class; it's the nobility, so the people with titles, like dukes and duchesses. A title does not necessary mean that a family is wealthy, but during this period, the aristocracy is getting wealthier and wealthier, and so more powerful. There is still a king and queen in France during this period. At this time, Marie-Antoinette is the queen. The Rococo is a very short artistic period.

What does Rococo art look like? It is extremely decorative, meaning it is elaborate and ornate. Rococo art is almost overly decorative, and has very little blank space. Artists used every inch of space and covered compositions in elaborate motifs, like sea shells, vine patterns, and swirling lines. The name Rococo comes from the French work *rocaille*, which was an earlier style of decoration characterized by a lot of seashells. Rococo art uses the seashell motif, but *rocaille* art has more empty space and is simpler.

Besides being extremely decorative, Rococo art is very playful. Because this art is mostly for the aristocracy, it tends to feature aristocratic leisure activities. It's about luxury and frivolity.

Slide 8



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What do I mean by “playful” art? Let’s look at *The Swing*, by Fragonard, which is a typically Rococo painting. What do we see here?

It’s a woman on a swing, shown mid-motion. She is in an overgrown aristocratic garden, in a fancy pink dress. She seems to be having fun, even kicking off her shoe as she swings. The background makes use of atmospheric perspective, with Fragonard giving us a glimpse into the rest of the garden. The garden is rendered in great detail, with the leaves of the trees composed carefully and decoratively. A man pushes the woman who swings towards a statue. Below the woman, hidden, behind the bushes, is another man, who looks up at the woman. He is looking up her dress.

This may seem like a shocking composition- a man looking up a woman’s dress. Nudity and sexual innuendo weren’t widely accepted in Europe, as we’ve discussed previously, but in the Rococo jokes about these topics become common for the upper class. We can think about this painting as a sort of joke. It shows an aristocratic leisure activity, so in terms of subject matter, it is very proper. And on the surface, it is very “proper.” Perhaps the woman isn’t aware of the peeping man. This of course, would raise issues about the gaze and consent, which was a concept that wasn’t thought of in the Rococo period as it is today. We think though that the woman is aware she is being watched. The man pushing her is perhaps her husband or proper suitor, while the man hidden in the bushes is likely her lover. How do we know this? The statue next to the man is a small cupid figure, a symbol of love. Its position close to the hidden man suggests that love is associated with him, not the man pushing the swing. Secondly, as the woman swings, she seems to spread her legs intentionally and exaggerates the motion. This is a sort of joke that the Rococo viewer would have recognized. This is what I mean by playful- art that mocks social norms and makes sexual innuendo. Rococo art is playful, it is about leisure, and so it often takes up love, and sexuality, as its subject.

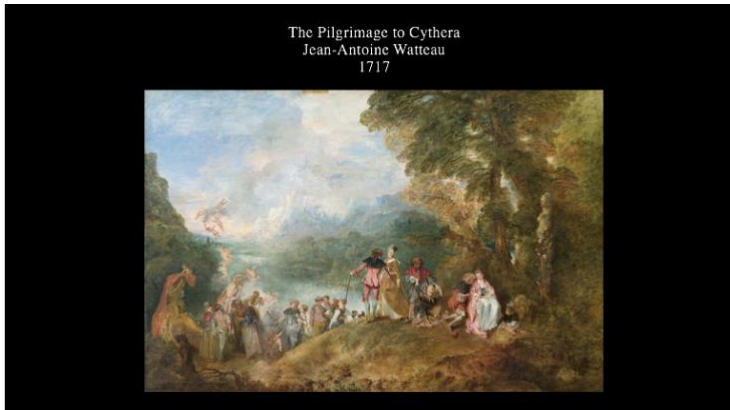
### Slide 9



This sort of display of sexuality is very different from what we’ve seen before, and is much more overt, even though no one in *The Swing* explicitly references sexuality or is even nude.

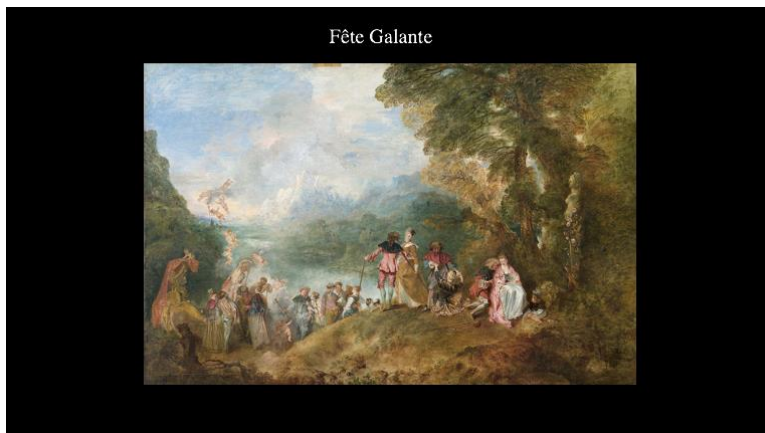
**RESPONSE QUESTION 1/2: Compare these two paintings in a few sentences.**

Slide 10



This is another very Rococo painting by Jean-Antoine Watteau. What seems Rococo about this painting? The big thing is that this is a depiction of an aristocratic leisure activity.

Slide 11



This particular painting is a special type of depiction called a **fête galante**- a category of painting that describes aristocrats at balls or picnics.

We know they're aristocrats from their clothing. Look carefully at how they're socializing; they're paired up in couples, kissing and flirting. Again, we have that Rococo playfulness and interest in love. The name of the island, Cythera, also adds to this. According to legend, Venus, the Greco-Roman goddess of love, was born at Cythera. But are they just arriving or leaving the island? This is up for debate.

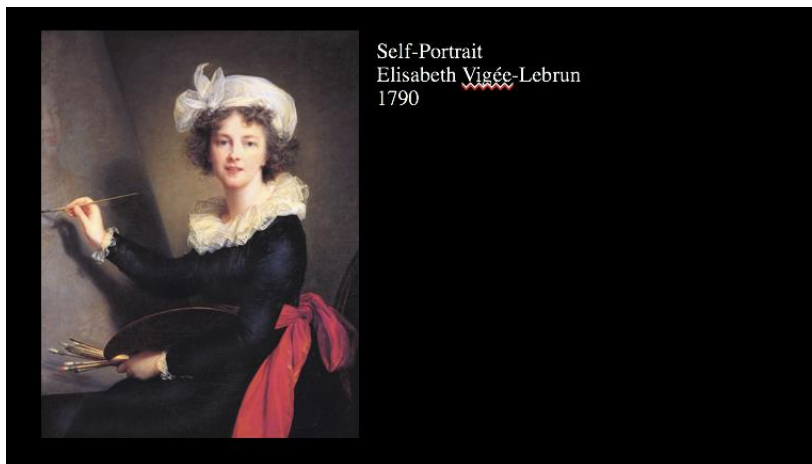
Slide 12



Let's turn now to this painting of Marie-Antoinette, the queen of France at this time. She's very famous in popular culture as a bad queen who loved luxury. She's also known for saying "let them eat cake," referring to hungry peasants just before the French Revolution. She likely never said this, but she was an unpopular ruler, in part because she did have a lavish lifestyle. When we're thinking about the Rococo, we have to remember that as the aristocracy was becoming more and more wealthy, the lower classes were becoming less wealthy. So while this art is showing the luxury of the upper class, this is not reflective of the entire population, and we'll soon see social unrest affecting art.

This particular painting shows the queen in an extremely elaborate dress, in a massive hall (we can tell from the large columns in the background). This image really showcases wealth. Marie-Antoinette was the queen and so she wouldn't be depicted as playfully or sexually as other women might have been, because it wasn't appropriate. So her portrait really emphasizes her wealth and power as queen, but still has that overly decorative quality that we associate with the Rococo.

Slide 13



Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun was Marie Antoinette's preferred portrait painter. She was one of the rare women artists to achieve success in the pre-modern period. She was largely self-trained and

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began painting portraits professionally as a young adult. Portraiture was considered more appropriate for female artists. Vigée-Lebrun achieved a very high level of success though, and was sponsored by the queen.

Think about how she is depicted here. This is a self-portrait in which Vigée-Lebrun shows herself at work; she is even painting a portrait of Marie-Antoinette, which we see partially completed on the canvas.

Slide 14



We've seen artists showing themselves at work before, like Diego Velazquez in *Las Meninas*. This is a recurring theme in art.

Slide 15



The Rococo style also appears in architecture, such as at the Palace of Versailles, outside of Paris. Architecture takes the same approach as painting, and its extremely overly decorative. There will be very little or no undecorated space.

So to recap, the Rococo is all about luxury. But, as we get into the early modern period the political situation will change and there will be resistance to this overt luxury. Going forward



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we'll be thinking about the French Revolution, so it is important to keep the Rococo in mind because we'll see art rejecting its aesthetics.

**RESPONSE QUESTION 2/2: Please submit any questions you have.**