Chapter 14

When the Renaissance Went Baroque

In This Chapter

- Defining Baroque art
- Tracing Caravaggio's influence
- Exploring Bernini's sculpture and architecture
- Basking in Baroque light
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After 150 years, the Renaissance ran out of "rebirth." Mannerism came and went like a fashion (1550–1600), and a new 100-year period, the Baroque, took root in the psyches of artists, patrons, and the European public. The Baroque is the artistic side of Catholicism's comeback during the Counter-Reformation. The Catholic Church enlisted Baroque art and architecture as weapons in the cultural wars with the Protestants. But Protestant countries adopted the Baroque style, too, adapting it to their own needs. In the Catholic nations, the Baroque tended to serve religion, attracting people to the Church with sumptuous or dramatic art and architecture, while Protestant states used the Baroque to create stately, elegant architecture often to advertise their worldly power or

strikingly realistic landscape, still life, and everyday or *genre* scenes in painting.

The Reformation, ignited by Martin Luther in 1517, knocked the wind out of the Catholic Church. Half of Europe turned its back on the pope: Northern Germany, Scandinavia, England, and part of the Low Countries all converted to Protestantism.

To hold on to its shrinking flock, the Church launched the Counter-Reformation, which officially began at the Council of Trent (1545–1563), even though it had unofficially started earlier. The Counter-Reformation cleaned up the Church's act, chastising wayward priests and power-hungry bishops, requiring all clergy to be educated, and founding the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits). The Jesuits, who underwent a highly rigorous classical training, submitted to the pope absolutely, founded religious schools throughout Europe, and converted non-Christians. Though the Council of Trent confirmed most Church doctrines, the Council upheld one of

Martin Luther's chief complaints: It condemned the selling of *indulgences* (forgiveness for sins), which had been widespread for centuries.

In addition, the Council of Trent gave Catholicism a Baroque facelift, starting in about 1600. That may have been its most potent reform, because it's what people saw first.

What did the facelift look like? Unlike Renaissance art, which inspires quiet contemplation, Baroque art reaches out to people and provokes action. Baroque paintings are filled with dramatic movement (saints in ecstasy or pain, charging horses, turbulent skies), striking contrasts of light and dark, vivid colors, and earthy realism. Often, Baroque artists depicted the heroic acts of martyrs and saints to inspire the lower classes to accept their own suffering and not lose faith. Baroque architecture (in Catholic countries) reached out to Catholics, welcoming them into churches. Inside, the splendor

of sumptuous Baroque relief and sculpture exalted the congregation, inspiring them to participate fervently in their faith.

Annibale Carracci: Heavenly Ceilings

Illusionistic ceiling frescoes were fashionable in the Baroque period. Annibale Carracci, born in Bologna in 1560, helped develop the style when he moved to Rome in 1595. Two years later, Cardinal Odarico Farnese commissioned Carracci to fresco the Palazzo Farnese ceiling to celebrate a wedding in his family. The Farnese frescoes became almost as famous as Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel Ceiling, which was one of Carracci's inspirations. Carracci divided the barrel vault of the Farnese central hall into rectangular compartments to frame his animated pictures of mythological love scenes. The lovers in these episodes seem to swarm over the expanse of ceiling, which looks like an upside-down art gallery. *Trompe l'oeil* statues of slumbering *ignudi* (nude youths) and bronze medallions separate the scenes.

Before painting the Farnese ceiling, Carracci and his cousin Ludovico founded a highly influential art school (the Accademia degli Incamminati) in Bologna, where students studied Renaissance and classical art and nature. The students spread the Carracci style throughout Italy. Among the most famous were Giovanni Lanfranco (1582–1647); Domenico Zampieri, known as Domenichino (1581–1641); Guido Reni (1575–1642); and Giovanni Francesco Barbieri, known as Guercino (1591–1666). Lanfranco combined Carracci's revived classicism with Caravaggio's dramatic intensity (see the following section). Guercino expanded upon Carracci's sense of space in the Farnese ceiling. In his fresco *Aurora* (1621–1622), painted in the Villa Ludovisi in Rome, the ceiling appears to open up into infinity. Painted architectural

forms soar above into a heavenly space where the horses of Aurora charge through the clouds, bringing on the dawn.

Shedding Light on the Subject: Caravaggio and His Followers

Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, known more simply as Caravaggio (1571–1610), was the greatest and most influential painter of the Baroque style. He was also a quick-tempered Bohemian who was often jailed for brawling. In 1606, he knifed a man to death while arguing with him over a tennis match and had to flee Rome. In absentia, a Roman court condemned Caravaggio to death (though he was pardoned toward the end of his life). The fugitive artist settled in Naples a few months later, but had to flee within a year for brawling. From there he journeyed to Malta, where in 1608 he was imprisoned following a quarrel with a powerful knight. He escaped to Sicily, making still more enemies. Eventually, he worked his way back to Naples where he was stabbed in the face, probably by allies of the Maltese knight. The artist survived the wound and continued painting and fighting. The fact that Caravaggio was often on the run helped to spread his extraordinary style, which was soon imitated across Europe.

Caravaggio infused his work with more gritty naturalism than any previous artist, hiring common people as models for saints and apostles, which shocked many of his contemporaries. He dramatized his religious scenes by throwing a diagonal light across his subjects, highlighting some of their features (to emphasize certain emotions and actions) and leaving the rest in shadow. Caravaggio's

lighting technique is called *tenebrism,* from the Italian word *tenebroso* which means "gloomy" or "murky." His paintings recount climactic moments while powerfully suggesting the events that precede and follow them.

Caravaggio created his dramatic lighting effects by letting natural light stream through a high window or with a highly placed lamp that threw a beam down onto his subjects. This technique, known as *cellar lighting,* yields dramatic effects if the artist positions his models well.

In *Calling of Saint Matthew* (1599–1600), the cellar light slashes across the back wall and illuminates the faces of some of the men crowded around a wooden table where Matthew counts his money (see the color section). Three of Matthew's companions regard Jesus, who has just entered and stands in the shadows. The cellar lighting streaming through the window almost traces the line of Jesus's index finger, which points at the tax collector Matthew, who's about to change jobs. But the future apostle resists, avoiding Jesus's eyes and staring stubbornly at the stack of coins on the table. The painting illustrates the tug-of-war going on inside Matthew. The tension between light and dark, between pointing fingers and gazing eyes staring in opposite directions, heightens the drama to the breaking point.

Notice that despite Matthew's reluctance to sign on, Jesus's feet are already turned toward the exit and the future. Caravaggio was the first to depict a single tense moment and let the tension stretch the moment backward and forward in time.

To help break the barrier between a painting and the viewer, Caravaggio and other Baroque painters placed highly illusionistic objects — a bed, a copper bowl, someone's foot — at the bottom edge of their paintings so that

the objects appear to project into the viewer's space. You feel that you can touch these objects, so you become more involved in the painting.

In the following sections, I examine the work of artists who were influenced by Caravaggio.

Orazio Gentileschi: Baroque's gentle side, more or less

Orazio Gentileschi (1563–1639) was the first of Caravaggio's many followers. Gentileschi emphasized realism like Caravaggio, and placed his subjects close to the viewer in a stop-action moment as in his *The Lute Player* (1610). In this sensitively rendered painting, a female lute player, illuminated by Caravaggio's cellar-lighting, gently strums her instrument. It's a fine work, but there's no tension and no stirring sensuality as in Caravaggio's *The Musicians* (1595–1596) and *The Lute Player* (1595–1596). The stop-action in the Gentileschi painting is truly stopped. The frozen moment doesn't pull us in multiple directions as in a Caravaggio painting. One of Gentileschi's most moving works is his *Madonna with Child* in the Gallery Borghese in Rome. The tender warmth in the mother's face as she gazes at her child is magnified by the lighting.

Perhaps the reason *Madonna with Child* is so convincing is because Gentileschi injected his feelings for his own daughter, Artemisia, into the painting. Gentileschi was very close to his daughter, whom he taught to paint. He taught her so well that by the time Artemisia was 17, she had already surpassed him (see the following section).

Shadow and light dramas: Artemisia Gentileschi

Artemisia Gentileschi (1593–c. 1652) wasn't the only female artist in the Baroque period. But she is one of the few to paint historical and religious paintings. Most other female artists were pigeonholed into portrait, still-life, and devotional paintings.

Among Artemisia's greatest works are *Susanna and the Elders* (1610), *Judith Slays Holofernes* (1620), and *Lucretia* (1621). Like the heroines in *Lucretia* and *Susanna and the Elders*, Artemisia was raped. Her personal experience resonates in these works. Like her father and Caravaggio, Artemisia placed her figures intimately close to the viewer. The extremely dark background in *Lucretia* thrusts the sharply lit woman still farther into the viewer's space, while highlighting

Lucretia's psychological isolation after her rape. Lucretia squeezes her left breast while clutching a dagger to indicate what's going to happen next.

The Ecstasy and the Ecstasy: Bernini Sculpture

The statues of Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1598–1680), the greatest Baroque sculptor, seem like living stone. They convey both powerful emotion and a lively sense of motion. The feeling of movement is often driven by a wound-up tension as in his remarkable *David* (1623).

> Michelangelo's *David* (see Chapter 11) is a resurrection and extension of classi-

cal sculpture. The tension in his *David* is powerful but passive. It stays inside David's mind and muscles. Bernini's *David,* on the other hand, is active. He is just half of a violent equation; the unseen Goliath is the other part. You don't see the giant, but you feel his presence and can gauge his distance by David's reaction to him. Baroque tension is not merely internal; it interacts with the space around it, charging it with energy. Bernini's *David* doesn't seem stuck on his pedestal like Michelangelo's statue. He's ready to fire his sling, and then leap off his platform to finish the job. Active sculpture like this was intended to animate Catholics with religious fervor.

Bernini's most compelling work is his *Ecstasy of Saint Theresa* (see Figure 14-1), which he sculpted for the Cornaro family chapel in the Church of Santa Maria della Vittoria in Rome. Because the chapel is dedicated to St. Theresa of Avila, Bernini sculpted a statue based on her life. St. Theresa suffered from severe pain (possibly caused by malaria). Eventually, she mystically transmuted the pain into ecstasy. She perceived this transmutation as a vision in which an angel repeatedly drove a fiery lance into her heart. The pain was "so sweet that I screamed aloud," she explained, "but at the same time I felt such infinite sweetness that I wished the pain to last forever."

Bernini captures the saint's experience of sweet pain perfectly. You see and feel it in her eyes and mouth, in the limp hand and dangling foot, which link her to the earth, and in her open posture, which invites the pain to stay. The pure joy on the angel's face contrasts strikingly with Theresa's mixed expression of anguish and bliss — especially because the angel is about to pierce Theresa's heart again. (The sculpture suggests that, on earth, we can never experience the unmixed joy the angels feel.) The contrast

establishes a force field between the saint and angel that gives the sculpture its Baroque dynamism.

Figure 14-1: Bernini's *Ecstasy of Saint Theresa* is the *Pietà* (see Chapter 12) of Baroque sculpture.

Scala / Art Resource, NY

Embracing Baroque Architecture

Baroque architects in Catholic countries strove to make buildings active, inviting, and dramatic. Baroque architecture is driven by a directional point of view that coaxes visitors into the church and draws them through a sequence of increasingly sumptuous forms toward a visual and emotional climax, an explosion of Baroque splendor above the altar. The artwork over the altar usually consists of exquisite relief with playful *putti* (cherubs) peaking down from clouds surmounted by Christ in his glory framed by a golden sunburst.

To achieve these architectural crescendos, designers often decrease the spacing between columns as they get closer to the altar or make columns and pilasters gradually grow, visually

leading the congregation forward and upward.

Carlo Maderno (1556–1629) launched the Baroque movement in architecture when he designed the facade for the Roman church Sta. Susanna in 1597. During most of the 16th century, Roman church facades were clean-cut, geometrical Renaissance structures or intentionally disjointed Mannerist buildings. Maderno replaced the static look of Renaissance architecture with dynamism and harmony. The large pediment capping the second level of the church echoes the smaller pediment over the entrance. The second-floor central window frame mirrors the first-floor door frame. The round ground-level columns are replaced by rectangular pilasters on the second level. And elegant scrolls (which would become characteristic Baroque ornaments) bracket the entire second-floor level, giving the facade an upward, sweeping momentum.

Sta. Susanna was the launch pad for a style of sumptuous grandeur that would soon make Sta. Susanna look bland and uninspired. In 1607, Pope Paul V commissioned Maderno to design a long nave for St. Peter's (in the Vatican) and to redo the facade.

When Maderno died in 1629, Pope Urban VIII replaced him with Gian Lorenzo Bernini who was also a brilliant architect. His first task was to design a *baldachino* (canopy) over the altar, which would be the focal point of the most important Catholic church in the world. Like many Baroque artists, Bernini often sought to unite painting, sculpture, and architecture in a common front to win back the Church's lost flock.

By unifying sculpture, relief, and architecture, Bernini made St. Peter's Basilica one of the most uplifting churches in the world. The massive bronze canopy he designed rests on twisted columns that soar about 80 feet high. The canopy is topped by an ornate crown. A golden orb (representing the earth) surmounted by a golden cross sits on the

crown.

While continuing work on the interior, the pope commissioned Bernini to transform the vast piazza in front of St. Peter's into a welcoming space. He achieved this by designing curved *porticoes* (roofed colonnades) around the piazza, which are connected to two straight porticoes that attach to the sides of St. Peter's. The curved porticoes reach out to embrace the world like wide-open arms, while the straight porticoes draw people into the church. Bernini built the colonnade from simple Tuscan rather than showy Corinthian columns, which would tend to intimidate rather than welcome ordinary people. (Tuscan columns resemble Doric columns, but the former have a profiled base and are usually unfluted.)

Baroque buildings were designed to invite crowds to gather around them and to interact with neighboring structures, usually by dominating them. By contrast, Renaissance churches and buildings tend to be more flat and reserved.

The Baroque style migrated north as the Renaissance style had in the 16th century. Protestant countries absorbed and modified the style because it was intended to serve different ends. In Holland, for example, the Mauritshuis (in the Hague) is a building of stately grandeur, but with decidedly less splash than its Catholic counterparts. The overall impression of Protestant Baroque is one of controlled elegance.

Powerful princes and dukes erected palaces in the Baroque style to celebrate their power and awe their subjects. In France, the Palace of Versailles, built in the late 17th century (see "Versailles: Architecture as propaganda and the Sun King"), was designed by the architects of Louis XIV to show the unruly French nobility that an absolute monarch was now in charge.

In the Catholic Habsburg Monarchy (or Austrian Empire), the Baroque style served to glorify both church and state. Austrian architects began building in the Baroque style after 1690. Two of the greatest structures are Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlach's Karlskirche (St. Charles Church) in Vienna, and Jakob Prandtauer's Monastery of Melk, which perches on a hilltop above the Danube River. Both buildings look as ornate and appetizing as Vienna's famous desserts.

Karlskirche (see Figure 14-2), designed by Johann Bernhard Fischer von Erlach (1656–1723) in 1716, is the greatest Baroque church north of Italy. (Fischer von Erlach also designed the Schönbrunn, the Habsburg Monarchy's answer to Versailles.) When a plague hit Vienna in 1713, Holy Roman Emperor Charles VI vowed to build a church to honor St. Charles Borromeo, the patron saint of plagues and his namesake, when the pestilence ended. The Baroque masterpiece Karlskirche is the result.

Figure 14-2: St. Charles or Karlskirche, designed by Johann Bernhard Fisher von Erlach, is the architectural crown of the former Austrian Empire.

Andreas Ceska

Fischer von Erlach used a hybrid style, harmonizing elements from Italian Baroque, Ancient Rome, and modern Rome. The two gateway-tower pavilions behind the columns were influenced by Italian Baroque designs of Francesco Borromini and Bernini. The green elliptical dome rises over a Corinthian portico modeled after the Roman Pantheon (see Chapter 8) and

the Maison Carrée (see Chapter 8). A statue of St. Charles Borromeo crowns the pediment. The flanking columns, which are carved with reliefs recounting St. Charles's life, were inspired by Trajan's Column in Rome (see Chapter 8).

But there's more to these columns than that. With the death of Charles II, the last Habsburg ruler of Spain, the Iberian Peninsula and its vast New World colonies were lost to the Holy Roman Empire centered in Vienna. The columns of Karlskirche represent the Pillars of Hercules (doorway to the Atlantic at the Strait of Gibraltar) at the southern frontier of Spain. With the columns, Charles VI marked his claim for the last time to a nation that had been part of the Habsburg Monarchy for two centuries.

Dutch and Flemish

Realism

Spain ruled the Low Countries, also known as the Netherlands, until the northern part (Holland) won its independence in 1609 and officially became Protestant. (The Dutch independence movement was dictated by religion as much as politics and money.) But Spain held on to the southern Netherlands, Flanders, which remained staunchly Catholic.

Protestant Baroque painting was less exuberant than Catholic Baroque painting. In Holland, it was intended to mirror ordinary life. Sometimes the ordinary scenes had moral messages, but they were not religious subjects. During the Reformation, Protestants had rebelled against the use of images of saints and martyrs in Catholicism. In Holland, religious paintings were banned by the Calvinist government.

But in Catholic Flanders, which remained

under Spanish control until 1798, artists like Peter Paul Rubens, a devout Catholic, frequently painted religious themes. Nevertheless, Flemish art is less transcendental than its Italian counterpart. The Flemish and Dutch had always been a practical people. Their art reflects that national trait. The Dutch, in particular, loved material goods and were fond of paintings that had a shop-window appeal, displaying lifelike objects that you could almost sink your teeth into.

The Dutch had a love affair with art, including the still life, which they transformed from a backwater to a mainstream painting genre. Dutch people were proud of their hard-won independence and their thriving mercantilism (think Dutch East India Company), and they liked to see Dutch life celebrated in painting. Holland produced a lot of painters to satisfy that love — so many, in fact, that Dutch painters *had* to specialize (because art was traded on a open-market system rather than by commission). Some artists just painted flowers; others specialized in food or poultry. There were even expert bug painters.

This specialization led to collaborative painting. Many artists pooled their talents and made composite canvases. You need a chicken, call so and so — he'll paint you the best fowl in Holland. Want some bugs on your rose petals? Send for Mr. van Bloom or whomever.

The Dutch and Flemish also loved to read into paintings for double meanings. So Dutch artists filled their canvases with visual double-entendres and symbolism. Who knows what that bumblebee hovering over a rose or that cooked chicken thigh really represents?

In the following sections, I cover the art of the greatest Dutch and Flemish masters, Rubens, Rembrandt, Hals, and Vermeer.

Rubens: Fleshy,

flashy, and holy

The Flemish artist Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640) was a master painter, drawer, sculptor, architect, engraver, businessman, and diplomat. He also spoke seven languages (very useful for a diplomat). In 1600, he moved to Italy to study the Italian masters. Shortly after his arrival, he landed the perfect job to realize his goal. The duke of Mantua, Vincenzo I Gonzaga, hired Rubens as a copyist. His job description: Copy the great Italian painters so the duke could have facsimiles of their masterpieces in his private gallery. What a break! It was like being paid to go to graduate school — the best graduate school in the world! Rubens was also required to paint some of the most beautiful noble women in Italy (such as his *Portrait of Marchesa Brigida Spinola Doria*) for the duke's beauty-queen museum. Rubens remained with the duke for eight years, painting babes and copying masterpieces.

In 1601, Gonzaga sent him to Rome to copy masters like Raphael and Michelangelo. While in the Eternal City, Rubens watched Annibale Carracci's highly disciplined team painting the Farnese Gallery. Rubens later applied Carracci's team approach in his own painting workshop in Antwerp. Before leaving Italy in 1608, Rubens had already evolved his famous Rubenesque style — richly colored, crowded, yet perfectly composed canvases that erupt with boundless vitality. His *Fall of Phaeton* (1604–1606) and especially *St. George and the Dragon* (1606–1607) both roil with characteristic Rubenesque energy. St. George and his horse practically charge off the canvas. In spite of Rubens's stellar talent, Gonzaga never purchased a single Rubens original. Talk about not seeing the talent right under your nose!

Rubens's fortes were agitated movement, dramatic lighting, and illusionistic figures that plunge or fall into the viewer's space. Often, his paintings have an upward thrust. *Christ Risen* (1616) illustrates this tendency

(see Figure 14-3). Of course, the upward thrust in this painting is symbolic. The angels' drapery and Christ's shroud rise toward heaven as Jesus lifts himself up from his tomb. The illusionism Rubens used to create Christ's left foot — which appears to be perpendicular to the picture plane — makes it look like Jesus is stepping out of the painting. The resurrection appears to occur right in front of the viewer. Never has Christ seemed so earthbound before, even as he rises from the dead. He is both weightless (floating upward into the clouds) and as solid as a body builder rising from his workout bench. The *putti* and angel that assist Christ look on in amazement. Only Jesus is unsurprised by his casual yet glorious resurrection.

Figure 14-3: Peter Paul Rubens's *Christ Risen* (1617) brims with Baroque power and drama.

Scala / Art Resource, NY

In some ways, *Christ Risen* is atypical. Rubens's paintings are usually crowded with active people; beefy men and fleshy women sprawl across his canvases; *putti* tumble from the clouds. In his masterful *Raising of the Cross*, the muscular mass of figures is depicted at a 45-degree angle and seems to spill from an invisible cornucopia into the view-

er's space. Jesus and the men crucifying him are a river of flesh flowing toward you. Yet the men are raising Christ's cross. This two-directional motion charges the painting with tension.

Rembrandt: Self-portraits and life in the shadows

Following Caravaggio's lead, Rembrandt (1606–1669) was a master of *chiaroscuro* (see Chapter 11) and dramatic lighting. He learned to manipulate light and dark for dramatic effect probably from the Utrecht School in Holland, which was influenced by Caravaggio, but also from his teacher Pieter Lastman. Lastman was influenced by Tintoretto's unique use of chiaroscuro.

In Rembrandt's *The Blinding of Samson*, instead of light streaming from above (in so-called "cellar lighting"), it pours in from an open tent to expose the cruel blinding of the Old Testament strong man. Delilah, holding the scissors with which she cropped Samson's hair and virility, looks back aghast, yet without pity. Like many of Caravaggio's paintings, *The Blinding of Samson* is rife with action moving in opposite directions. Delilah scuttles away to the left while a Philistine soldier thrusts his spear toward the prone Samson at the right. But in his later work, the light is less like Caravaggio and more like Tintoretto, mysterious and emotive. It suffuses his canvases with a spiritual light. Rembrandt went beyond either of his predecessors in interpreting human nature. His penetrating portraits and many religious paintings of Old Testament stories reveal the inner world of the characters he so brilliantly depicts. Rembrandt also plumbed the depths of his own character in a lifelong series of self-portraits; over 60 survive.

Compare Rembrandt's *Philosopher in Meditation* (see Figure 14-4) to Caravaggio's *Calling of Saint Matthew* (see the color section). Caravaggio spotlights dramatic moments and uses light symbolically. Rembrandt employs a softer, warmer radiance to probe character.

Figure 14-4: In Rembrandt's *Philoso-pher in Meditation* (1632), the old thinker quietly con-tem-plates the mysteries of life.

Gloria Wilder

Philosopher in Meditation illustrates how Rembrandt used light and shadow to suggest meaning through contrast. The steps, winding around a cavern of darkness, symbolize the philosopher's meditative journey into the unknown. The room looks almost like a convex mirror with the coiling stairs and the top of the window arcing into the curve of the upper part of the staircase. The golden light, pouring richly through the window, casts an aura of warm radiance around the philosopher as if he were a cerebral saint. On the opposite side of the room, a woman (perhaps the philosopher's wife) stokes the fire, taking care of the practical side of life that he probably neglects.

For more on Rembrandt's technique, in particular his unique brushwork, see Chapter 29.

Laughing with Hals

Frans Hals (c. 1582–1666) painted no religious scenes or historical paintings, no land-

scapes or still lifes. His focus was the face, mostly merry ones with wine-red cheeks, either solo or in groups. He had a gift for capturing any fleeting expression that passed over the features of his sitters: an impish smile, a man grinning greedily as he pours his beer *(Young Man with a Jug of Beer)*, a buxom girl giving a man the eye *(Gypsy Girl)*.

Hals is famous for his robust paintings, which look like a cross between a Christmas card and a beer ad, though he illustrated the sober sides of life, too. For example, Hals's *Lady Governors of the Old Men's Home at Haarlem* depicts the staid and pragmatic directors of the Haarlem Old Men's Home. At first, the elderly women's faces seem solemn, even forbidding. But if you look long enough, a warm humanity begins to glow inside each face, especially in their eyes. Caring for the old men isn't just a job for these women; it's a labor of love. Besides the hints of humanity, a lifetime of experience is etched on each careworn face.

In spite of his great talent, Hals was only moderately successful, partly because people took his light and loose brushstroke for laziness. Impressionism has since taught people the expressive power of light and loose application of paint. But in those days, who knew? *Young Man with a Skull (Vanitas)* is one of Hals's most remarkable works. Sensuality and symbolism fight it out in this painting. The boy's confident charm and infatuation with someone outside the frame is undimmed by the gruesome skull in his hand. With the exotic, almost erotic orange feather sprouting from his hat, his dashing good looks, and his unflappable faith in tomorrow, the youth represents *vanitas* (vanity). He *is* the joy of life holding death in the palm of his hand. But the ominous skull, which is his future (and all our futures), can't touch him. He's too brimful of life to notice death.

Vermeer: Musicians,

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maids, and girls with pearls

In his short life, Johannes Vermeer (1632–1675) only created 34 paintings. He painted slowly, fine tuning his work again and again before releasing it to the buyer, usually Pieter van Ruijven. Vermeer's works are not typically Baroque. He didn't use flamboyant colors like Rubens. Nothing jumps off the canvas at the viewer. In fact, his paintings are rather spare and soft spoken. He usually illustrates a domestic scene with one or two characters in a room containing only a few objects: a piano, a table, a pitcher of water. Everything is still like a stopped clock. And yet there's an inner tension — psychological or spiritual. His subjects are firmly grounded in everyday life — a maid pours milk, a girl strums a guitar, a man turns a globe — yet they are somehow outside the actions they perform. A quiet mystery hangs over Vermeer's paintings like a diaphanous mist you sense but can't see.

Vermeer is celebrated for his extremely subtle and sensual use of light, which can be warm and cool in the same painting. The light is often a mélange of warm yellow and cool blue filtering in through an open window. The soft, cool radiance makes his paintings seem intimate and aloof at the same time. Vermeer almost always painted the same room (his studio with its checkered tiled floor and paneled window). He knew all the room's moods and learned to let them speak on his canvases when the noise of the world was momentarily silenced. Maybe that's why he wouldn't let his wife and 11 children enter his studio. (Or maybe he just wanted some peace and quiet!)

Vermeer's *Girl with a Pearl Earring* (see the color section) is sometimes called the "Mona Lisa of the North." Yet in 1881, *Girl with a Pearl Earring* sold for just two guilders (about US$2) — Vermeer's popularity had sunk

that low. Today he is considered one of the greatest 17th-century painters and *Girl with a Pearl Earring* is priceless.

What's so special about the "Mona Lisa of the North" other than that she's more fetching than the *Mona Lisa* of the South? Perhaps it's the fact that she is seductive and innocent at the same time. She is the crossroads where innocence and experience meet up and get to know each other. Also, the contrast between her maid's garb and that thumb-size pearl dangling from her ear is shocking and yet appropriate. How did a maid afford such a large, perfect pearl? Or what did she have to do to get it? But her innocence eliminates the possibility of anything untoward. What's most impressive about *Girl with a Pearl Earring* isn't the woman's striking looks, but *how* she looks at the viewer. She is so fascinated by the viewer that she makes *you* feel special. The black background intensifies this feeling by extracting *Girl with a Pearl Earring* from her own world, allowing her to enter the viewer's space — in a very Baroque way!

If you're unable to go to the Mauritshuis museum in The Hague to see this painting, you can get the next best thing by watching the film version of Tracy Chevalier's book *Girl with a Pearl Earring* (starring Colin Firth as Johannes Vermeer and Scarlett Johansson as the subject of the painting). Many of the scenes in this poetic, beautifully shot film look like Vermeer canvases brought to life.

French Flourish and Baroque Light Shows

France's Baroque style had an Italian side

and a French side. The Italian part is represented by the émigré painters Nicolas Poussin and Claude Lorraine, who spent much of their careers in Rome. The home-turf artists and architects include Georges de La Tour (though he admired Caravaggio) and Jules Hardouin-Mansart (one of the designers of the Palace of Versailles).

Poussin the Perfect

Nicolas Poussin (1594–1665) moved to Rome in 1624 and spent most of his life there. Titian was a major influence on him (an exhibit of the Venetian master's work took place in Rome in the mid 1620s), but Poussin, who hitched the Baroque style to Greek and Roman art, was more interested in classical forms and harmony than Titian was.

Yet his classical settings serve Christian ends. The rectilinear steps of the classical temple in his *The Holy Family on the Steps* lead not only into the sky but also to heaven (see the color section). The top step simply dead-ends in the clouds. The Holy Family sits on the stairs (Mary with perfect posture), like friendly but vigilant sentinels, or maybe guides. Yet the stairs invite the viewer to climb more than the holy guides who seem unaware of the viewer. Like other Baroque artists, Poussin places objects at the bottom of the *tableau* (picture) where they are most accessible to the viewer — where he feels as though he can reach them. The viewer is almost *tempted* to pick an apple from the fruit basket on the ledge.

Notice that John the Baptist has already yielded to the temptation and hands an apple to baby Jesus. Jesus with an apple is a traditional motif, suggesting that he will undo Adam and Eve's sin. Thanks to him, the apple won't lead to a second fall but to an ascent up the stairway to heaven.

Candlelit reverie and Georges de La Tour

Caravaggio also influenced Georges de La Tour (1593–1652), but La Tour wasn't a mere follower. Instead of grand religious dramas like the Italian master, La Tour created intimate, candlelit settings for his religious and secular paintings. In La Tour's paintings, you feel as though you're in the same room with Mary Magdalene or Jesus. His source of illumination is often a solitary candle on a table or in someone's hand rather than an on-high, Caravaggio light. He placed divinity (light) within reach, instead of somewhere beyond the window.

In La Tour's *Joseph the Carpenter* (c. 1645), the young Jesus holds a glowing taper to help Joseph cut wood in a very dark room. The candlelight radiates on Christ's face as if it were rising from within him. The light merely glances off the bald head and arms of Joseph. Like Caravaggio, La Tour's light strikes his subjects from an angle, dramatically highlighting some features while leaving other parts in shadow. Although La Tour lived in the small town of Lorraine, his work came to the attention of King Louis XIII, who in 1638 elevated La Tour to "Painter to the King." Despite the royal favor, after La Tour's death, he was largely forgotten until the 20th century.

Versailles: Architecture as propaganda and the Sun King

To weaken the French nobility, King Louis XIV (*Le Roi Soleil*, or the Sun King) simply moved away from them. It was a smarter ploy than it appears. The powerful nobles of France had revolted violently during Louis's *minority* (when he was too young to rule —

Louis was crowned shortly before his 5th birthday in 1643). The experience soured him on nobles, and he never fully trusted them again.

When Louis XIV assumed full power in 1661, he transplanted the royal residence from unruly Paris to rural Versailles, 11 miles away. This forced the French nobility to meet him on his own terms. At first, he ordered the 5,000 most defiant nobles to live with him at Versailles so he could prevent them from brewing revolutions behind his back. A palace that could accommodate 5,000 nobles and their retinues and families had to be enormous. So Louis transformed his father Louis XIII's somewhat modest hunting lodge into the greatest palace the world had ever known, built on 2,000 acres of land.

To achieve his vision of architectural splendor, Louis XIV hired Louis Le Vau (who died shortly afterward) and then Jules Hardouin-Mansart. Hardouin-Mansart's most famous design is the Hall of Mirrors (357 mirrors framed by 17 arches), where the Treaty of Versailles was signed, ending World War I. Louis commissioned André Le Nôtre to design the vast formal gardens and fabulous fountains, which are arranged symmetrically about a vertical axis that begins at the backdoors of the palace and extends through the Grand Canal. The king hired Charles Le Brun to design the interior frescoes, relief, and sculpture, all of which he did in a highly sumptuous Baroque style.

The grandiose Palace of Versailles was designed to be the visible symbol of the Sun King's absolute power. Like many other monarchs, Louis viewed himself as God's representative on Earth. The power of church and state were united in him. *L'Etat, c'est moi* (I am the state) is one of his most characteristic statements.

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In the Limelight with Caravaggio: The Spanish Golden Age

Spain produced no homegrown artists in the 16th century. The Spanish court preferred imports like El Greco and especially Italian artists such as Titian. After Columbus's discovery of the New World, Spain acquired a vast empire. In addition, the Spanish crown had to govern Europe's most multicultural population and was at continual war with its neighbors.

The Spanish kings didn't have the time or inclination to nurture homegrown art. But after the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588, Spain's power declined and the royal

attitude toward Spanish art changed. King Philip IV, a poet and art fan, nurtured all the arts, sponsored a painting competition, and hired Diego Velàzquez to be his principal court painter. Seventeenth-century Spain produced a slew of great painters such as Velázquez, José Ribera, Francisco Zurbarán, and Bartolomé Estéban Murillo, and brilliant novelists, poets, and dramatists, like Miguel de Cervantes, Lope de Vega, and Pedro Calderón de la Bsarca. The era became known as Spain's Golden Age.

Ribera and Zurbarán: In the shadow of Caravaggio

Like so many other artists of the time, Jusepe (or José) de Ribera (1591–1652) went to Rome, the art capital of the western world, to study painting in about 1613. Lat-

er, he moved to Naples where he remained for the rest of his life.

In Rome, Ribera became an ardent disciple of Caravaggio. Like Caravaggio, Ribera used striking contrasts between light and dark and chiaroscuro to heighten the drama in his paintings.

Counter-Reformation clergy and political leaders often commissioned paintings of martyrs to inspire Catholics not to lose their faith and to attract Protestants back to the Catholic fold. Like Caravaggio, Ribera typically used street people as models for his martyrs, giving his religious paintings an earthy look. Ribera's *St. Jerome* (the 4th- to 5th-century author of the Latin or Vulgate Bible) has an emaciated, been-through-it-all body. Similarly, in his *The Martyrdom of St. Bartholomew* (the 1634 version in the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.), he depicts a careworn, rustic-looking saint confronted by a coarse executioner who looks like a Mafia hit man. Like Caravaggio, Ribera dramatizes the events he paints, in this case, by having the saint spread his old but muscular arms heroically to accept the blade of his brutal executioner. St. Bartholomew was flayed alive.

Francisco de Zurbarán (1598–1664) also studied in Rome and adopted many of Caravaggio's techniques. In fact, he was dubbed by his countrymen the "Spanish Caravaggio." But the figures in his religious paintings are less rugged than Caravaggio's. In fact, they tend to look like middle-class sitters rather than laborers and street people. For example, the model in his *Ecstasy of St. Francis* looks as well educated and middle class as the real St. Francis, whose father was a wealthy cloth merchant.

Zurbarán was commissioned to paint many religious paintings for King Philip IV who supported artists who shared his Counter-Reformation ideals. Zurbarán's paintings so impressed Philip IV that he granted the

artist the title "Painter to the King."

Velázquez: Kings and princesses

Like Ribera and Zurbarán, Diego de Velázquez (1599–1660) also traveled to Rome to study, first from 1629 to 1631, and then between 1649 and 1651. In 1623, King Philip IV, one of Velázquez's biggest fans, appointed him to be his principal court painter. He remained the king's court painter for the rest of his life.

Velázquez developed a very free and loose brushstroke (which at times appears almost impressionistic) so that, up close, his canvases look like a jumble of crisscrossing brushstrokes. But when you step back, those loose strokes tighten into a sharp image. To achieve this effect, Velázquez used long-handled brushes so he could see the effect of his strokes from a distance.

Many of Velázquez's early works show a strong Caravaggio influence. But later on, the Caravaggio elements become simply a handful of the many ingredients in Velázquez's unique style. *Los Borrachos (The Drunkards)* (c. 1629) and *Joseph's Bloody Coat Brought to Jacob* (1630) are among Velázquez's most Caravaggio-like paintings. He painted *Los Borrachos* just before going to Italy. But Caravaggio's style had infiltrated Spain a few years earlier through intercourse with Dutch and Flemish artists. Also, Rubens traveled to Spain in 1628 and spent a lot of time with Velázquez, whom he persuaded to travel to Italy.

Velázquez's greatest work, *Las Meninas (The Maids of Honor)* (see Figure 14-5), is really two paintings, and possibly more. The viewer sees one of the paintings in the mirror. Velázquez is in the process of painting either the picture you see in Figure 14-5 or a por-

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trait of King Philip IV and his queen Marie-Anne of Austria, whose reflections appear in the mirror. Velázquez stares at them like models while painting. At the same time, the artist gazes at the viewer, because the viewer stands in the same spot (out of the picture frame) as the king and queen. The *infanta* ("princess") Margarite and one of the maids of honor also focus on the royal couple. Interestingly, the principal figures in *Las Meninas* aren't posing! They are simply being themselves, caught off guard like actors between scenes. Some people believe the princess got dolled-up to be painted; after all, she is the subject, isn't she? Is she about to join her parents on the viewer's side of the picture frame so she can pose for the king's greatest painter? Or have the king and queen walked in to check the progress of the princess's portrait and Velázquez has momentarily looked up from his task?

Figure 14-5: *Las Meninas (The Maids of Honor)* is Velàzquez's most intriguing work.

Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY