

The painting of Sébastien Bourdon after 1650

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The reign of Louis XIV began in 1661 and was to last until 1715. Sébastien Bourdon (1616-1671) finished his career during the first decade of the Sun King's rule. From 1648, the symbolic date that saw the creation of the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture (of which Bourdon was one of the founder members), the king and his minister Colbert sought to bring together the forces of artists with the aim of making France into the main artistic hub of Europe to the detriment of Italy. This art in service to the king naturally extended from great royal construction sites such as those at Versailles and Marly, but was also fostered by princely patrons and others, and found expression in churches, in Paris as well as in the provinces, such as Toulouse and Montpellier.

Room Bourdon

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European Art
from the Fourteenth
to Eighteenth Century

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Sébastien Bourdon

The fact that Bourdon was a great portraitist is borne out in his *Portrait of the Count Palatine Adolf Johann of Pfalz** (c.1652), executed at Stockholm where he was court painter to Queen Christina of Sweden, looking to begin a new career (1652-53). He painted several portraits of the queen (fig.1) and the members of her court, including that of this general who conquered Poland, the brother of Charles Gustav, the future king of Sweden. As in the *Man Wearing Black Ribbons**, dating to some years later but exhibited in Room 11, Bourdon provides a natural interpretation of the composite portrait in the manner of Van Dyck (1599-1641). On his return to Paris he painted his *Landscape with a Mill** (1653-57), with its characteristic tonal intricacy of flat surfaces verging on the natural, his geometrical research and the bizarre forms of his interwoven architecture and cliffs. Bourdon also ranks alongside the many landscape painters inspired by Poussin and Dughet* such as Etienne Allegrain (1644-1736)* and the Flemish artist, Francisque Millet (1642-1679)*, who was working in Paris. His sketch, the *Burial of a Saint** (c.1665-66) for a large altarpiece that remains unknown, compels recognition with its clear and effective vertical geometrical structure. As evidence of this mastery, he received large commissions for religious or decorative work at this time, including that of the gallery (now lost) of the Hôtel de Bretonvilliers in Paris. His final works (fig.2) are much more expressionist and filled with movement, with cascading draperies creating an almost Gothic effect : the *Lamentation of Christ** (1665-71).

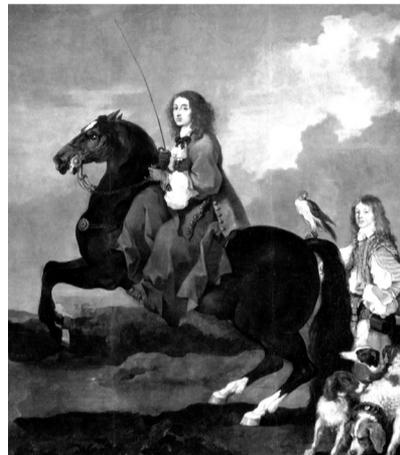


fig.1- Sébastien Bourdon
*Portrait of Queen Christina
on Horseback*
Madrid, Museo del Prado
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fig.2- Sébastien Bourdon
Rapture of Mary Magdalene
Dunkirk, Musée des Beaux-Arts
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Wealthy Artistic Circles in Toulouse

Jean III de Troy (1638-1691) was active in his native city of Toulouse, and in Montpellier where he founded an academy (1680-88) and executed large decorative works (ceilings of the archaeological society museum and the Law Courts). His *Portrait of Madame of Bonsy** (c.1666), wife of René Gaspard de la Croix, marquis of Castries and governor of Montpellier, and niece of the cardinal of Bonsy whose portrait was painted by Domenichino (1581-1641) (Room 11), is displayed in a fine old provincial frame. With its clear integrity and quality of workmanship, which explain the success it enjoyed locally, this painting takes up the Parisian style that may have been disclosed by Bourdon during his time in Montpellier.

Antoine Rivalz (1667-1735) of Toulouse completed his training in Rome, moving in the entourage of Pietro da Cortona (1596-1669) and Carlo Maratta (1625-1713). On his return to Toulouse, he became a city painter and engineer, and helped to found the Academy of Toulouse. His 1706 ex-voto, the *Assumption of the Virgin** is derived more from Italian examples than from Poussin.

* An asterisk indicates that the work mentioned is displayed in the room