

# Early Eighteenth-century French Painting and Northern European Influences

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From before 1700, academic principles – the primacy of drawing and classic artists such as Poussin – were offset by a growing interest in the art of Rubens, the Venetians and their use of colour. French artistic production came to feature a diversity of talents and models, with novelty lying in the powerful vogue for Northern European – Flemish and Dutch – influences, both in style and subject.

## Room Raoux

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European Art  
from the Fourteenth  
to Eighteenth Century

### Jean Ranc (1674-1735) et Jean Raoux (1677-1734)

Jean Ranc trained with his father in Montpellier, then with Hyacinthe Rigaud (1659-1743). He worked as a portrait painter to Louis XIV and King Philip V of Spain. His masterwork, *Vertumnus and Pomona*, one of the finest eighteenth-century canvasses, is a mythological piece – perhaps a portrait in disguise – painted in France around 1716-20 and inspired by Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The finesse of its workmanship, the glistening sheen of the draperies, the eye for detail and subtle chiaroscuro – such as Pomona's backlit face before the parasol – recall the work of Dutch artists. The idealized oval-shaped face, the long fingers and ruffled draperies are marks of Rigaud's teaching.

An apprentice in Montpellier under Antoine Ranc, the father of Jean Ranc, Jean Raoux (1677-1734) went to Paris to train under Bon Boullogne (1649-1717). He spent time in Italy, staying in Rome, Florence, Padua and Venice, where he received several commissions. His *Judgement of Solomon*\* (1710) therefore has a quite Venetian style of tonality and caprice, while its fine workmanship and backlighting reveal that Raoux had already seen and admired the Dutch artists. Following his return to Paris in 1714, he established himself as a painter of genre scenes in the Northern European manner (fig.1) and a highly esteemed portraitist, particularly in the world of theatre. Meanwhile, his reception piece on a subject from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* – *Pygmalion and Galatea*\* – allowed him to enter the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture.

Dating to around 1730, his *Dido and Aeneas*\* is very theatrical in its composition and extravagant costumes: the richness and depth of the shimmering colours add further magic to this scene from Virgil's *Aeneid*. At the same time, Raoux also started a fashion for vestal virgins (Vesta being a priestess and the goddess of hearth and home), usually as a portrait in disguise extolling a young girl's purity and virginity or a lady's role as keeper of the home: the *Vestal Virgin tending the Sacred Fire*\*.

Other artists were to work in this French/Northern European idiom, bringing Northern themes and style into vogue. These included Antoine Watteau (1684-1721), Jean-Baptiste Santerre (1651-1717) and Alexis Grimou (1680-1733): *Young Man in Armour*\*. Conversely, Carel van Falens (1683-1733)\* was of Flemish origin but living in Paris and a member of the Royal Academy; he took up the equestrian themes of Wouwerman (1619-1668) (Room 5) with a sentimental and courtly elegance most probably styled on Watteau.



fig.1- Jean Raoux  
*Silence*  
Avignon, Musée Calvet  
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### Portrait Painters Rigaud and Largillière

Hyacinthe Rigaud and Nicolas de Largillière dominated the art of portraiture. A Parisian trained in Antwerp, Largillière painted his *Self-portrait*\* around 1726 in brown tones reminiscent of Rembrandt (a replica of the one painted for his daughter on her marriage and kept in a private collection). The Catalan Rigaud, a pupil of Antoine Ranc in Montpellier as was Jean Raoux, was fond of rustled draperies and glistening textures forming a profound and elegant setting for the face of the famous philosopher *Fontenelle*\*. The device of the bull's eye window adds a trompe-l'oeil effect in the manner of Rembrandt. His *Study of hands*\* is an aide-mémoire of various pieces that he was to reutilize freely in different portraits, a common technique in workshops at the time as models would only pose for faces.

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