



Diploma Lecture Series 2012
Absolutism to enlightenment: European art and culture 1665-1765

Rocaille ornament

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13/14 June 2012

Lecture summary:

We tend to use the words “decoration” and “ornament” interchangeably, but this lecture emphasises the difference between them. “Ornament” is a separable object or a precious feature. “Decoration” is an ensemble: it is a conception of an environment, an interior or some other form of décor as a “total work of art”. The achievement of the Rococo was to integrate ornament and decoration with exceptional thoroughness, yet, although the boundaries between them may seem to blur, they were never one and the same thing.

The Rococo aesthetic was both intensely decorative and besotted with ornament. Since the reign of Henri IV “les maîtres ornemanists” (the great ornament-designers) had been housed in the Louvre and rubbed shoulders with their aristocratic clients. Due to the luxury-loving aesthetics of the French aristocracy, Watteau’s achievements as an interior decorator could be admired on a par with his easel paintings; the architect Gilles-Marie Oppenord was renowned for designing interiors in their integrality, including the fireplaces, mouldings, candelabra, clocks and furnishing; François Boucher was ready to turn his hand to almost anything – from designs for the theatre, for fountains, tapestries, carriages, cartouches, fans and fire-screens.

We examine the crucial impact of the Italian Baroque and of the fascination with grottos and *grotteschi* on French artists and designers, and how these defined some of the characteristic features of Rococo ornament.

Artists and designers mentioned include:

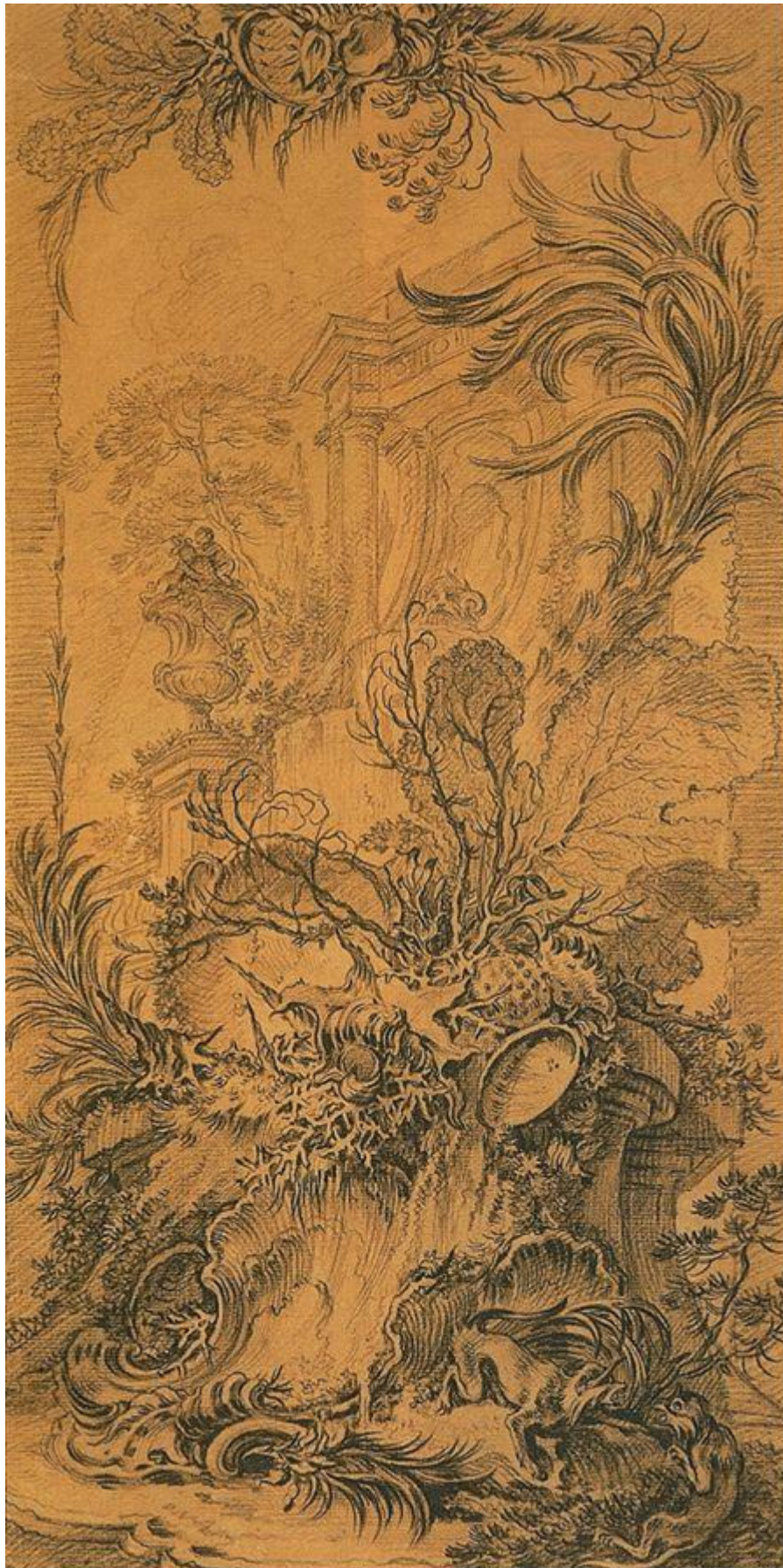
Jean-Etienne Liotard 1702-1789
Gilles-Marie Oppenord 1672-1742
François Boucher 1703-1770
Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier 1695-1750
Jean Bérain the Younger 1678-1726
Thomas Germain 1673–1748
Jacques de Lajoüe 1687-1761
Jean-Baptiste Pillement 1728-1808
Charles Cressent 1685–1768

Slide list:

- * 1. François Boucher: *Rocaille*, ca. 1730-37, drawing in black chalk on brown paper
- *2. Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier: *Tureen, stand and cover*, 1735-40, silver
- *3. Gilles-Marie Oppenord: *Architectural capriccio with a fountain*, ca. 1720 drawing in pen, India ink, grey wash over black chalk
- *4. Charles Cressent: *Commode*, ca. 1745–49, pine and oak veneered with purplewood, mahogany and bois satiné (bloodwood), gilt-bronze mounts, portor marble top

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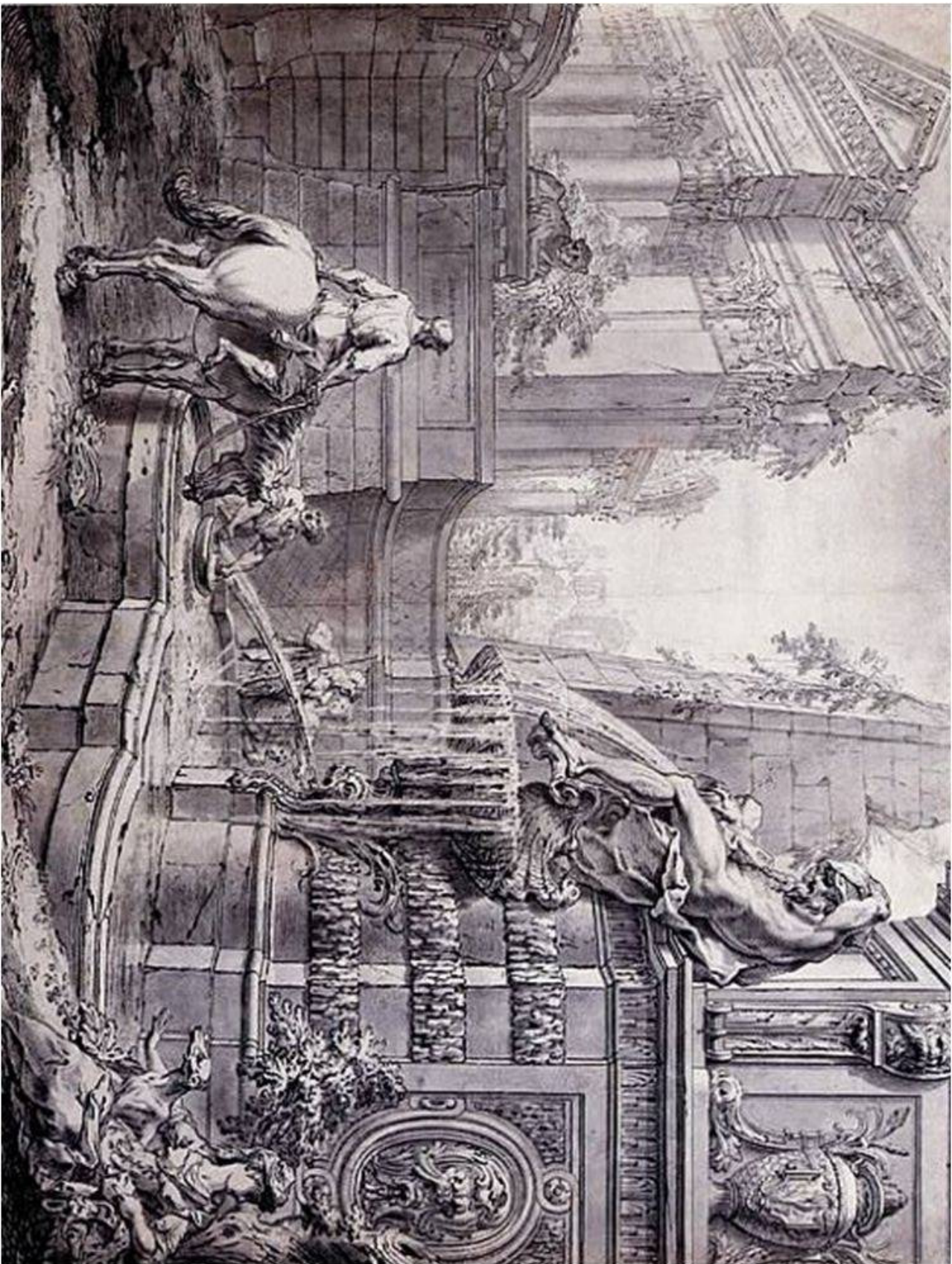




François Boucher: *Rocaille*, ca. 1730-37, drawing in black chalk on brown paper



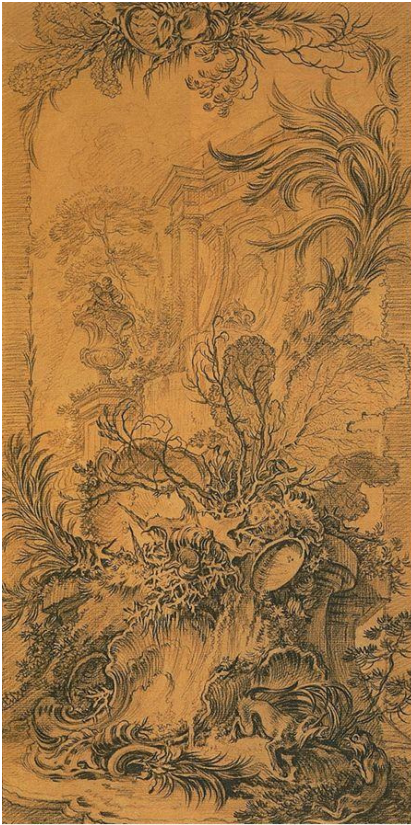
Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier: *Tureen, stand and cover*, 1735-40, silver



Gilles-Marie Oppenord: *Architectural capriccio with a fountain*, ca. 1720 drawing in pen, India ink, grey wash over black chalk



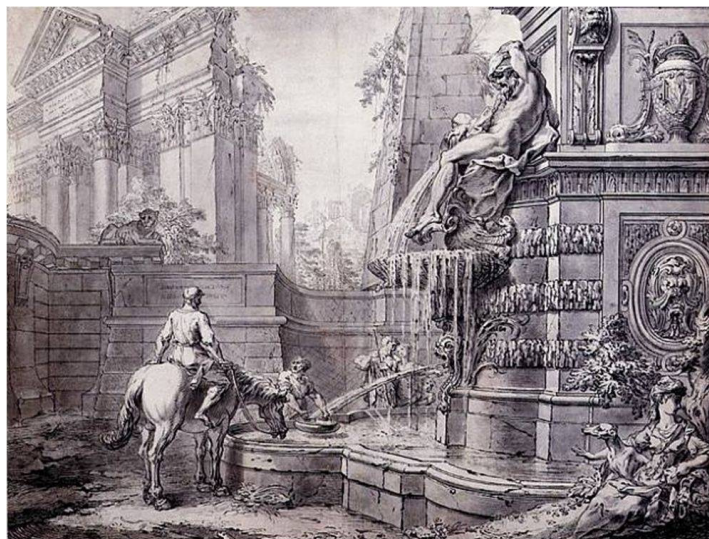
Charles Cressent: *Commode*, ca. 1745–49, pine and oak veneered with purplewood, mahogany and bois satiné (bloodwood), gilt-bronze mounts, portor marble top



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