

The Royal Academy

Cardinal Mazarin, King Louis XIV's chief minister, created the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture in 1648. His successor, Jean-Baptiste Colbert, tightened the government's hold on the arts and crafts by sponsoring royal workshops to produce Flemish-style cloth, Venetian glass, Chinese porcelains, and domestic tapestries as a way of reducing or eliminating imported goods. He also issued more than 150 regulatory edicts to diminish the power of the guilds.

Colbert reorganized the Royal Academy and appointed Charles Lebrun director in 1663. The two wanted to raise the fine arts (*beaux-arts*) above the level of craft and artisanship and to promote art for the glorification of France and Louis XIV, "the Sun King." The academy became a membership organization which one had to be invited to join. Instead of the "masterpiece" required by the guilds of the past, the academy asked prospective members to produce a "reception piece" (*morceau de réception*) that demonstrated both technical skill and knowledge of history and literature. Failure to gain acceptance into the academy could damage an artist's career, whereas admission usually guaranteed widespread recognition and patronage.