

Giovanni Paolo Panini

Italian (Rome), 1691–1765

The Interior of St. Peter's during the Visit of the Duc de Choiseul, 1756–57

Oil on canvas

Lent by the Boston Athenaeum

From an elevated viewpoint near the entrance, we look down the nave of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome toward the high altar and its magnificent bronze baldachin, a ceremonial canopy over the altar.

While the architectural splendor is the painting's indisputable star, this work was commissioned to commemorate a specific day: on April 5, 1756, Étienne François, comte de Choiseul-Stainville, later duc de Choiseul, paid an official visit to the basilica as part of his accreditation as French ambassador to the pope, who at the time was both the spiritual leader of the Catholic Church and the secular head of the Papal States. Illuminated by a shaft of light, Choiseul (wearing a gold-embroidered waistcoat) and his entourage are seen at center right, preceded by a cardinal in red robes.

Francesco Guardi

Italian (Venice), 1712–1793

The Meeting of Pope Pius VI and Doge Paolo Renier at San Giorgio in Alga, 1782

Oil on canvas

Lent by Guido Bartolozzi Antichità SRL

Pope Pius VI arrived in Venice on May 15, 1782. As the first pope to visit the city in 600 years, he was treated with the greatest possible honors. Doge Paolo Renier (chief elected magistrate of the Republic of Venice) traveled out to the small island of San Giorgio in Alga with gilded barges to await the guest at the city's watery boundary. The key players are identifiable by their dress: the standing pope in red and white and the doge kneeling before him in white and gold, accompanied by senators in scarlet togas. A glimpse of the city's silhouette is visible at left.

Michele Marieschi

Italian (Venice), 1710–1744

Doge Pietro Grimani Carried into Piazza San Marco after His Election,

c. 1741

Oil on canvas

Lent by Galerie G. Sarti, Paris

Elected to the ducal throne on June 30, 1741, Doge Pietro Grimani (chief elected magistrate of the Republic of Venice) is carried out into Piazza San Marco in a float to greet his subjects and scatter newly minted gold coins into the crowd. Dockyard workers wielding long red staffs attempt to hold back the populace jostling for the most promising spots from which to snatch the money. In the foreground, tourists in carnival costume watch the spectacle from makeshift viewing platforms. This work exemplifies a key characteristic of reportorial view paintings: the spectator inside the composition is a surrogate for the viewer in front of it.

Antonio Joli

Italian (Venice), 1700–1777

The Courtyard of the Doge's Palace with the Papal Nuncio Giovanni Francesco Stoppani and Senators in Procession, c. 1742

Oil on canvas

Lent by the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Representing the pope who was also the secular head of the Papal States, a papal nuncio is the church equivalent of an ambassador, and as such his entry into Venice was marked by a formal ceremony. Here Nuncio Stoppani leaves the palace after his audience with the doge (chief elected magistrate of the Republic of Venice). Shaded by two parasols, he leads a procession of clerics and senators. Antonio Joli depicted the majestic internal courtyard of the Doge's Palace, shown in steep recession and capped by the domes of the Basilica of San Marco behind it.

Antonio Joli

Italian (Venice), 1700–1777

King Ferdinand VI and Queen Maria Barbara of Braganza on the Royal Longboat at Aranjuez, c. 1752

Oil on canvas

Lent from a private collection courtesy of Sotheby's

As the Spanish royal longboat is rowed toward the royal palace of Aranjuez, south of Madrid, several figures on its balcony are greeted by a crowd of spectators on the riverbank: King Ferdinand VI at left, Queen Maria Barbara in the center, and the famous opera singer Farinelli (Carlo Broschi) beside her on the right. The carved and gilded cabin displays the same opulent sophistication as the parade gondolas seen in the Venetian scenes in this exhibition. Having retired from the stage, Farinelli was charged with creating the court's entertainments, including those for this pleasure fleet (see illustration). During the boat trips, he usually sang two arias, often accompanied by the royal couple.



Francesco Battaglioli (Italian, 1725–1796), *The Royal Longboat*, 1758, watercolor from a manuscript owned by Farinelli. Patrimonio Nacional, Madrid

Francesco Battaglioli

Italian (Venice), 1725–1796

King Ferdinand VI and Queen Maria Barbara of Braganza in the Gardens at Aranjuez on the Feast of Saint Ferdinand, 1756

Oil on canvas

Lent by the Museo del Prado, Madrid

To celebrate the name day of Ferdinand VI, king of Spain, on May 30, the celebrated Italian castrato singer Farinelli organized a program of entertainments at the royal palace of Aranjuez, south of Madrid. This painting was commissioned by Farinelli to commemorate the occasion. In the center, Queen Maria Barbara rides in a three-wheeled chaise with the king walking beside her in a red coat and blue sash. Farinelli himself is seen at left in a blue coat with red cuffs, leading a small group of musicians. The hundreds of paper lanterns lining roofs, windows, flower beds, and riverbanks would be lit at dusk.

Giovanni Paolo Panini

Italian (Rome), 1691–1765

King Charles III Visiting Pope Benedict XIV at the Coffee House of the Palazzo del Quirinale, 1746

Oil on canvas

Lent by the Museo di Capodimonte, Naples

Following his victory over the Austrian forces at Velletri (just south of Rome), Charles of Bourbon, the new king of Naples (later Charles III of Spain), traveled to Rome for an audience with Pope Benedict XIV on November 3, 1744. To record the occasion, he commissioned this depiction of his arrival at the “Coffee House” pavilion in the gardens of the Quirinal Palace, the papal residence. The elegant Coffee House, decorated with paintings by Pompeo Batoni and Giovanni Paolo Panini, was built as an informal reception room for Benedict XIV. For this painting Panini amplified the real building’s architecture in order to lend the scene extra grandeur: he extended the depth of the side wings from one to two windows and doubled the columns and busts. He thus transformed the restrained pavilion into a small palace.



Ferdinando Fuga
(Italian, 1699–1782),
Caffèhaus, 1741–43.
Quirinal Palace gardens,
Rome. Segretariato
Generale della
Presidenza
della Repubblica

Giovanni Paolo Panini

Italian (Rome), 1691–1765

King Charles III Visiting Pope Benedict XIV at the Coffee House of the Palazzo del Quirinale, c. 1744–45

Oil on canvas

Lent from a private collection

This fluidly painted oil sketch for the finished painting at left shows Giovanni Panini's supreme skill at capturing likeness and atmosphere. Dressed in red and gold, the young King Charles stands tall yet betrays a hint of timidity before his first meeting with the pope. He is greeted by Cardinal Troiano Acquaviva, the Spanish ambassador, who inclines his head toward him and extends his open arms. In a room seen through a doorway at left and illuminated by sunlight, the pope sits on a throne underneath a ceremonial canopy and calmly awaits his guest.

Antonio Joli

Italian (Venice), 1700–1777

The Abdication of Charles III as King of Naples in Favor of His Son Ferdinand, c. 1759

Oil on canvas

Lent by the Museo del Prado, Madrid

When King Ferdinand VI died without an heir in 1759, his half brother Charles inherited the kingdom of Spain, but international treaties barred him from occupying the Spanish throne while remaining king of Naples. This painting records his abdication in favor of his eight-year-old son, Ferdinand, on October 6, 1759, in the Royal Palace in Naples. Bernardo Tanucci, the prime minister, reads out the abdication decree at the foot of the dais, while the boy's mother, Queen Maria Amalia, looks at the viewer from the doorway at right. Charles departed for Madrid later that day (see painting at right).

Antonio Joli

Italian (Venice), 1700–1777

The Departure of Charles III from Naples to Become King of Spain, 1759

Oil on canvas

Lent by the Museo del Prado, Madrid

This sweeping view of the Bay of Naples against a backdrop of the smoking Mount Vesuvius shows an event that took place only a few hours after the abdication ceremony seen in the painting hanging nearby. The sixteen vessels of the Spanish fleet sent to escort Charles III from Naples to Barcelona are ready to depart. Antonio Joli's composition concentrates on two messages: on the water, Spain's naval power; on the shore, the reaction of the Neapolitan population to the loss of a beloved king. The painting was commissioned by Charles's mother, Elisabeth Farnese, whose immense ambitions for her son were fulfilled with his ascension to the Spanish throne.

Lorenzo Quirós

Spanish, 1717–1789

Decoration of the Calle Platerías for the Entry of Charles III into Madrid,

c. 1760

Oil on canvas

Lent by the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando

Charles III's official entry into Madrid was celebrated nine months after his actual arrival. This view shows the Calle Platerías (Silversmiths Street, today a section of the Calle Mayor), named after the craftsmen whose workshops were located there. Among the city's wealthiest tradesmen, the street's occupants created a spectacular display along the route of the procession. Every available balcony is hung with tapestries or damask cloths. Farther down, both sides of the street are lined with temporary decorative façades bracketed by double columns. A detachment of soldiers on horseback comes before the royal procession and builds a sense of anticipation for the king's imminent arrival.

Giuseppe Zocchi

Italian (Florence), 1711/17–1767

The Palio Race in the Campo in Honor of Grand Duke Francis of Tuscany and Archduchess Maria Theresa of Austria, 1739

Oil on canvas

Lent by the Banca Monte dei Paschi di Siena, Museo San Donato, Siena

To this day, the bareback horse race called “Il Palio” is held twice a year in Siena’s Piazza del Campo. With a spirit of intense rivalry, each of the city’s districts enters a horse to run the hair-raising three laps around the square. Giuseppe Zocchi’s painting, however, depicts a unique occasion in 1739 when a special Palio was held as part of the festivities celebrating the official visit of the Grand Duke of Tuscany, Francis I, and his wife, Maria Theresa of Austria (the future emperor and empress of the Holy Roman Empire).

Giovanni Paolo Panini

Italian (Rome), 1691–1765

The Consecration of Giuseppe Pozzobonelli as Archbishop in San Carlo al Corso, 1743–44

Oil on canvas

Lent by the Musei Civici di Como

Dedicated to Saint Charles Borromeo, a former archbishop of Milan, Italy, the Roman church of San Carlo al Corso played host to the consecration of its new archbishop in 1743. In order to show his high regard for Pozzobonelli, Pope Benedict XIV performed the rite himself. The pope is seated at the high altar in the background, dressed in white. The ceremony has just finished and the new archbishop, wearing a golden miter (ceremonial hat), moves in a procession toward the front of the church, flanked by two other bishops. With his right hand, he imparts a blessing on the assembled crowd.

Pompeo Girolamo Batoni

Italian (Rome), 1708–1787

Pope Benedict XIV Presenting the Encyclical “Ex Omnibus” to the Comte de Stainville, Later Duc de Choiseul, 1757

Oil on canvas

Minneapolis Institute of Art; The William Hood Dunwoody Fund 61.62

In 1754, King Louis XV of France sent Étienne François, comte de Choiseul-Stainville (later duc de Choiseul), as an ambassador to Rome. He was to secure a decision from Pope Benedict XIV about a dispute concerning the authority of the French courts, the country’s bishops and the Jansenists, a controversial faction in the French Catholic Church. The result was an encyclical, or papal decree, addressed to the French bishops. It was presented by the pope to Choiseul-Stainville at the “Coffee House” pavilion in the gardens of the Quirinal Palace on October 16, 1756.

In contrast to the view paintings in this exhibition that depict papal audiences, Pompeo Batoni’s work introduces allegorical elements: female representations of Religion and Divine Wisdom flank the enthroned pope. Before a view of St. Peter’s Basilica, Saints Peter and Paul appear on a cloud below the dove of the Holy Ghost, who has inspired the pope.

Francesco Guardi

Italian (Venice), 1712–1793

The Nocturnal Good Friday Procession in Piazza San Marco, c. 1755

Oil on canvas

Lent by the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

In a rare view of a nighttime event, Francesco Guardi mastered the artistic challenge of depicting illuminated darkness. Unique to Venice, the Good Friday procession of the Blessed Sacrament took place in Piazza San Marco, lit entirely with wax candles for the occasion. The golden mosaics on the basilica's façade glisten at the far end of the square. In an age before electric (or even gas) light, this immensely costly spectacle dazzled every onlooker. One remarked: "Nothing in the world is as beautiful as Venice during this night. Lit by a million torches . . . the entire city seems to be ablaze."

Francesco Guardi

Italian (Venice), 1712–1793

Doge Alvise IV Mocenigo in the Corpus Christi Procession in Piazza San Marco, c. 1775

Oil on canvas

Lent by the Musée du Louvre, Paris

Compared to Francesco Guardi's night scene of Piazza San Marco hanging nearby, here the square is seen from the opposite direction; the spectator faces away from the basilica. Protected from the sun by a temporary colonnade supporting a white canopy, the procession moves clockwise around the edge of the square. At left, the doge (chief elected magistrate of the Republic of Venice) is clearly identifiable by his horn-shaped hat (see illustration), yellow silk robe, and fur shoulder cape. Accompanied by senators in their red togas, he follows the portable ceremonial canopy sheltering the Blessed Sacrament.



Italy (Venice), *Ducal hat*, c. 1675–99, silk and metal brocade, metal braiding. Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Johan Richter

Swedish, 1665–1745

The Bridge for the Feast of Santa Maria della Salute, before 1728

Oil on canvas

Lent by the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, Connecticut

Each year, a floating wooden pontoon bridge was specially constructed in Venice for a procession of thanksgiving to the church of Santa Maria della Salute (Our Lady of Health). Located outside the picture to the right, the church was built near the mouth of the Grand Canal to commemorate Venice's deliverance from the devastating plague of 1630–31, which had wiped out a third of the population. Richter's figures are ordinary Venetians who visit the church to pray after the official ceremony has ended. The pontoon bridge to the Salute is still built every year (see illustration).



Pontoon bridge to Santa
Maria della Salute 2008.
Wikimedia Commons

Bernardo Bellotto

Italian (Venice), 1721–1780

The Procession of Our Lady of Grace in Front of Krasiński Palace, 1778

Oil on canvas

Lent by the Royal Castle, Warsaw

Surrounded by flags and torchbearers, a multicolored wood statue of Our Lady of Grace is carried aloft through the streets of Warsaw, Poland, to a fanfare of trumpets. The grand Krasiński Palace stands in stark contrast to the humble wooden buildings and grazing cattle across the street. In the left foreground, a man in ragged clothes walks alongside gleaming horse-drawn carriages and a well-dressed family, highlighting the gap between the city's rich and poor. An annual procession with the same statue depicted by Bellotto continues to be held to this day (see illustration).



Procession with
figure of Our Lady
of Grace. Christiani
Foundation

Canaletto (Giovanni Antonio Canal)

Italian (Venice), 1697–1768

The Procession on the Feast Day of Saint Roch, c. 1735

Oil on canvas

Lent by the National Gallery, London

The procession on the feast day of Saint Roch, who was invoked against the plague, commemorated the end of a devastating outbreak in Venice in 1576. After Mass, the doge (chief elected magistrate of the Republic of Venice) and senators (in red togas) leave the church of San Rocco as spectators draw near to watch. Members of the doge's entourage carry the accessories of his office—a ceremonial stool, cushion, and sword. Many participants hold sprigs of flowers, as their scent was believed to ward off disease. On this annual occasion, an exhibition of paintings was held outside the Scuola Grande di San Rocco, a lay brotherhood charged with protecting the remains of Saint Roch.

Luca Carlevarijs

Italian (Venice), 1663–1730

The Regatta on the Grand Canal in Honor of King Frederick IV of Denmark, 1711

Oil on canvas

The J. Paul Getty Museum

When Frederick IV of Denmark visited Venice, a special regatta was staged for his enjoyment. Dressed in red, the king sits on the prow of a barge in the center. Spectators crowd every window and balcony along the Grand Canal, eager to catch a glimpse of the royal visitor. At left, a ceremonial barge commissioned by the Giustiniani family is decorated with a statue of the Roman goddess Minerva (with a helmet, spear, and shield) and a double-headed eagle, their heraldic animal. The Rialto Bridge is visible in the distance.

Michele Marieschi

Italian (Venice), 1710–1744

The Regatta in Honor of Prince Friedrich Christian of Saxony, c. 1740

Oil on canvas

Lent from a private collection

The regatta held in 1740 during the visit of Friedrich Christian, Crown Prince of Saxony (a state of the Holy Roman Empire located in present-day Germany) was the most sumptuous since that staged for Frederick IV of Denmark (seen in the painting by Luca Carlevarijs nearby). Instead of the view toward the Rialto Bridge chosen by Carlevarijs, Marieschi depicted the same location from the contestants' perspective as they reach the bend in the Grand Canal. This allowed him to include the prince's Venetian residence, Ca' Foscari, on the left. In the foreground, three gondolas are neck and neck, but a barge has ventured too far into their path, leaving only a narrow passage.

Giovanni Battista Tiepolo

Italian (Venice), 1696–1770

Ceremonial Barge for the Regatta in Honor of Prince Friedrich Christian of Saxony, 1740

Pencil and wash

Lent from a private collection courtesy of Hazlitt Ltd.

This working drawing preserves an early stage of Tiepolo's design for one of the barges participating in the regatta for Prince Friedrich Christian in 1740 (see painting nearby). The knight in armor standing on the prow personifies Poland, a country that the prince's father, Augustus III, ruled in addition to Saxony. To the right of the central vase, a boy holds two large fish symbolizing the rich bounty of Poland's rivers. Although a prolific painter of grand decorative programs in Venetian churches and palaces, Tiepolo produced only this one known design for a regatta vessel.

Francesco Guardi

Italian (Venice), 1712–1793

The Giovedì Grasso Festival in the Piazzetta, c. 1775

Oil on canvas

Lent by the Musée du Louvre, Paris

Francesco Guardi's painting is closely based on a drawing by Canaletto and its engraving by Giovanni Brustolon. It was probably commissioned by Doge Alvise IV Mocenigo or a member of his family. The doge is but a tiny figure under the blue awning on the lower level of the Doge's Palace at left. He watches the carnival celebrations, including a human pyramid of acrobats performing in front of a temporary pavilion. Venice's very identity was rooted in its rituals and traditions, which are the painting's true subjects.

Giovanni Paolo Panini

Italian (Rome), 1691–1765

A Ball Given by the Duc de Nivernais to Mark the Birth of the Dauphin, 1751

Oil on canvas

Lent by Waddesdon (Rothschild Foundation)

To celebrate the birth of a royal heir, the French ambassador in Rome, Louis Jules Mancini-Mazarini, duc de Nivernais, staged a ball in Palazzo Farnese. In the center of the floor, Nivernais is about to open the dance with the wife of the Venetian ambassador. The empty double-height space had been transformed into a glittering ballroom by Giuseppe Panini, the painter's son. Working hand in hand, the Panini father-and-son duo offered their patron a crucial advantage: the celebration could be designed from the outset with its only lasting record, the depiction on canvas, in mind.

Giovanni Paolo Panini

Italian (Rome), 1691–1765

The Decoration of the Piazza Farnese for the Celebration of the Marriage of the Dauphin, 1745

Oil on canvas

Lent by the Chrysler Museum, Norfolk, Virginia

The tall pavilion standing in the middle of Piazza Farnese in Rome is a temporary structure built for a specific event. Constructed of large pieces of canvas stretched over a wooden frame and decorated with sculptural elements made of papier-mâché and stucco, it represents the temple of Minerva, goddess of wisdom and learning. In front of her statue in the central arch, Cupid and Hymen, respectively the gods of love and marriage, are shown joining hands. This refers to the occasion for the celebration, the wedding of the French crown prince to a daughter of the king of Spain.

Giovanni Paolo Panini

Italian (Rome), 1691–1765

The Musical Performance in the Teatro Argentina in Honor of the Marriage of the Dauphin, 1747

Oil on canvas

Lent by the Musée du Louvre, Paris

The French royal marriage commemorated in the nearby painting ended with the bride's untimely death a year later. In honor of the prince's second nuptials, the French ambassador in Rome staged a musical performance in an opera house that was redecorated in damask and crimson velvet. On the stage, the orchestra and two choirs surround the main singers. The painting's patron, Cardinal de La Rochefoucauld, is seated at right in the third chair of the front row. He wears the badge of the French Order of the Holy Spirit on his black robes as well as the red stockings of a cardinal.

Giovanni Paolo Panini

Italian, (Rome) 1691–1765

The Flooding of the Piazza Navona, 1756

Oil on canvas

Lent by the Niedersächsisches Landesmuseum, Hannover

On Sundays in August, the Piazza Navona was transformed into a lake to alleviate the oppressive heat of the Roman summer. After the drains of the fountains had been blocked, the water spilling out of their basins flooded the slightly concave square within two hours. The water depth of about two feet still allowed carriages to drive around the square. This painting was commissioned by Clemens August, elector-archbishop of Cologne, on the occasion of his visit to Rome in summer 1755.

Luca Carlevarijs

Italian (Venice), 1663–1730

The Bucintoro Departing from the Bacino di San Marco, 1710

Oil on canvas

The J. Paul Getty Museum

On Ascension Day, Venice celebrated her authority over the seas with a symbolic marriage ceremony between the city and the Adriatic. Accompanied by a fleet of smaller boats, the magnificent two-story state barge, the Bucintoro, is about to depart from the Doge's Palace. In contrast to Canaletto's more serene depiction nearby of the festivities painted 35 years later, Luca Carlevarijs showed the bustle of the event as salutes are fired and vessels of all shapes and sizes throng the water.

Canaletto (Giovanni Antonio Canal)

Italian (Venice), 1697–1768

The Bucintoro at the Molo on Ascension Day, c. 1745

Oil on canvas

Lent by the Philadelphia Museum of Art

On the morning of Ascension Day, when a ceremonial marriage of Venice to the sea was celebrated, the doge and the senior officials of the Venetian government walked to the gilded state barge known as the Bucintoro. This canvas shows the new Bucintoro, completed in 1729 (the previous model is depicted in the painting by Luca Carlevarijs nearby). Shielded by a ceremonial umbrella, the doge has emerged from between the temporary market stalls set up for the Ascension Day fair. On April 23, 1745, the bell tower in Piazza San Marco had been struck by lightning, leaving it with a jagged edge until a scaffold for repairs could be erected after the fair.

Francesco Guardi

Italian (Venice), 1712–1793

The Balloon Flight of Count Zambeccari, c. 1784

Oil on canvas

Lent by the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Gemäldegalerie,
property of the Kaiser Friedrich Museumsverein

When Count Giovanni Zambeccari took off for the first-ever hot-air-balloon flight in Venice on April 15, 1784, a dense crowd of astonished Venetians lined every available vantage point. For safety reasons, the launch platform had been constructed on the open water, near the mouth of the Giudecca Canal. Francesco Guardi's view is taken from underneath the entryway of the Dogana, the customhouse at the tip of Venice where the Grand Canal and the Giudecca Canal meet. The Venetian version of the balloon carries, appropriately, a gondola instead of the customary wicker basket.

Pierre Antoine de Machy

French, 1723–1807

The Balloon Flight of Jacques Charles over the Place de la Concorde, Paris, 1783

Oil on canvas

Minneapolis Institute of Art; Gift of Russell A. Plimpton in memory
of Lt. (JG) William Gardner White, U.S.N.R. 45.22

On December 1, 1783, an estimated crowd of 400,000 people gathered to watch Jacques Charles and Nicolas Louis Robert ascend in their hydrogen balloon. In an early example of crowdfunding, hundreds had paid one crown each (roughly \$30 today) to help finance the construction and receive access to a special enclosure for a “close-up view” of the launch. Among the special-enclosure crowd was Benjamin Franklin, the diplomatic representative of the United States. Charles was the first to inflate a balloon with hydrogen. His balloon traveled from the Tuileries Garden in Paris to the village of Nesle 27 miles away, and was the longest flight attempted up to that time.

Hubert Robert

French, 1733–1808

**The Fire at the Opera House of the
Palais-Royal, c. 1781**

Oil on canvas

Lent by the Sarah Campbell Blaffer Foundation, Houston

The opera house of the Palais-Royal in Paris had been open for just 11 years when it was gutted by fire on the night of June 8, 1781. Its interior was entirely consumed by flames reported to have reached more than 300 feet in height. One eyewitness compared the sight to the eruption of Mount Vesuvius, familiar from paintings such as the one by Pierre-Jacques Volaire hanging nearby: “I never saw a more perfect image of Vesuvius or Etna. . . . From up close, the spectacle of the fire was horrifying. What power nature has through this terrible element! How frightening a blazing volcano must be!”

Hubert Robert

French, 1733–1808

**The Morning after the Fire at the
Opera House of the Palais-Royal, c. 1781**

Oil on canvas

Lent by the Musée Carnavalet, Paris

This scene of the morning after the fire is, in every respect, a counterpoint to the horrific night scene hanging nearby. In the gardens of the Palais-Royal, a crowd of fashionably dressed aristocratic spectators has assembled to gawk at the dark smoke rising from the still-smoldering opera house, which is hidden from view by a wing of the palace. The frantic dash to safety is replaced here by a leisurely stroll.

Pierre-Jacques Volaire

French, 1729–1799

The Eruption of Vesuvius, 1771

Oil on canvas

Lent by the Art Institute of Chicago

A torrent of lava bursts from the volcano's mouth, filling the night sky with a menacing orange hue and thick clouds of smoke. In the distance, the Bay of Naples serenely shimmers in the moonlight. A group of gentlemen observe the catastrophe with a mixture of fascination and nonchalance. The eruption of Vesuvius was Pierre-Jacques Volaire's career-defining subject. To distinguish his work from imitators who painted the spectacle without having seen it, he included an inscription at lower left reading: "View of the eruption of Mount Vesuvius on 14 May 1771, painted on-site by the chevalier Volaire."

Antonio Joli

Italian (Venice), 1700–1777

The Popular Revolt in Largo di Castello during the Famine, 1764–68

Oil on canvas

Lent by the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Gemäldegalerie

In 1763–64 a devastating famine struck the Kingdom of Naples and claimed the lives of 5 percent of the population. In Largo di Castello, the government built wooden huts for the sale of strictly rationed bread supplies at controlled prices. Peasants from the countryside stormed the city and raided the food stores. This highly unusual painting was commissioned by the Neapolitan government. Rather than seeking to represent the city in crisis, they may have intended it to be a statement of resilience: the impenetrable citadel dominating the center of the composition provides a reassuring fortification against social unrest as soldiers arrive to restore order.