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## Title of Object

The Attributes of the Arts and the Rewards Which Are Accorded Them

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## Photo of Object (optional)



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## Object Information

**Artist:** Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin

**Country:** France

**Date of Object:** 1766

**File Created:** 11/1/2017

**Accession Number:** 52.15

**Author of File:** Gerri Reid Skjervold

**Material/Medium:** oil on canvas

**Reviewer of File:** Kara ZumBahlen

**Department:** Paintings

**Last Updated/Reviewed:** 8/30/2017

**Culture:** French

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## Tour Topics

Symbols in Art: The Obvious and the Implied, symbolism-art, symbolism-in-art, highlights 1600 to 1850, group 6 tour, still life, stories/storytelling, artist, friendship, identity, mercury,

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## Questions and Activities (list 3 to 4 sample questions here):

1. In this deliberately arranged composition, what objects did the artist include?
2. Speculate on what you think the symbolic meaning of each object may be.
3. If you were creating a still life today about attributes of the arts, what kind of 'rewards' could be included in the composition?
4. What inanimate objects would you select for a still life that would represent what is important in your life? State one.
5. Chardin painted at a time when Rococo was in style, where lighthearted scenes of the aristocracy were depicted usually at play in frivolous activities in a palette of pastel colors. Does this work fall into that description, why or why not?

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### **Key Points (Form: subject matter, medium and techniques of manufacture, style, etc.)**

1. This oil painting composition has carefully selected and arranged objects that include: palette with brushes on a paint box, money or coins, building plans beneath drafting and surveying tools, bronze pitcher, red portfolio, books, plaster model of Pigalle's Mercury, and a ribboned Order of St Michael Award.
2. The symbolic meaning of each object selected by Chardin in this composition relates to a branch of the arts or an award as stated in the title: Palette with brush on paint box (painting); money or coins (reward); building plans with surveying or drafting tools (architecture); bronze pitcher (goldsmithing); red portfolio (drawing); books (literature); plaster model of Pigalle's Mercury (sculpture and also serves to honor Pigalle, much admired by Chardin); black ribbon with the Cross of the Order of St Michael Award (reward).
3. Our painting is a variant of one commissioned by Catherine the Great. In 1766, Catherine the Great commissioned a painting for the lecture hall of the Academy of Fine Arts in St. Petersburg from the French master Jean-Simeon Chardin. But when the canvas, *The Attributes of the Arts and Their Rewards*, arrived in Russia, the empress was so dazzled by the inventive composition that she decided to keep it for herself. The artful still life features a paint-daubed palette complete with knife and brushes, a plaster cast of a statue of Mercury, books, coins, a ewer, a portfolio of drawings and a black ribbon with the cross of the Order of St. Michael, all arranged in a rhythmic composition of form and color.

Unlike other established artists of his time, Chardin, in the days before photographic reproductions, often painted multiple versions of his successful panels and canvases. These works have always been among the most discussed of his career. Writing about one of the later versions of *Attributes*, no less than the incomparable Denis Diderot—the mastermind behind the *Encyclopedie* and an art adviser to Catherine the Great—declared in 1769: “While looking at ‘Attributes of the Arts,’ the eye is soothed and remains satisfied and at peace. When one has looked at this piece for a long time, other pieces appear cold, two-dimensional, commonplace and crude. Chardin is Paris in between nature and art; he.... is an old sorcerer from whom age has not yet stolen his magic wand.” (Tuchman)

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### **Key Points (Context: use, history, cultural information, artist bio, etc.)**

1. Who was Jean-Baptiste-Simeon Chardin? (1699-1779) He was the son of a carpenter who was born in Paris in 1699. By the time he began painting, the Baroque was fading in popularity and Rococo was becoming the style of the day. Primarily self taught, he painted mostly genre scenes, then still lifes, and at the end of his life pastel portraits. His true career, however, did not begin until 1728 when, thanks to the portrait painter Nicolas de Largillière (1656–1746), he became a member of the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture (*Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture*), to which he offered *The Skate* and *The Buffet*. Within the Academy, he served several offices earning a very respectable pension for his efforts for over 50 years. He was married twice, had two

daughters and a son, all of which died before him. Some of Chardin's collectors and supporters were monarchs Catherine the Great of Russia and Louis the XV, who granted Chardin a pension of 500 Livres in 1752 and in 1757 gave him an apartment in the Louvre. He was well respected by other art colleagues and entered artwork into the French Academy Salon for many years before he eventually managed it. He only painted about 200 works, (about 4 a year in his lifetime). His compositions were simple but beautifully composed, textured and atmospheric. (Using iPad: Show Laundress, genre scene and/or The House of Cards, child playing cards.) After his death, Cezanne, Matisse, Manet, Monet and Vuillard studied his techniques. (Wikipedia and Britannica. Note: Could connect to the Largilliere painting, if focused on a theme of artists' friends and mentors).

2. What was happening in France during Chardin's lifetime? The old social order of greedy monarchs with corrupt clergymen is exposed by the free press and a new intellectual movement called The Enlightenment began (French historian dates 1715-1789). The first Encyclopedia was compiled by Denis Diderot and published from 1751-1772 in 33 volumes. Interest in modern science, art, and philosophy spread across Europe. The French Revolution (1789-1799) and Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815) fueled by the Enlightenment occurred after Chardin's death.
3. Rococo and Chardin: The Rococo was a backlash against Baroque's formality and stiffness. Rococo is not concerned with religious matters nor dramatic expression. It began in Paris in the early 1700s. Included in its description is graceful, enchanting, lighthearted themes, lacking anything of substance. Aristocrats seem to be at play in make believe settings, flirting, picnicking and playing music at parties. The work seemed animated and clever like a sensual daydream. Aristocrats were decked out in velvet elegant laces and rich golden embroideries, stylish and charming. Their faces were soft and rosy, and eternally young. Men wore fancy hairdos, used rouge on their lips and cheeks and sported high heels (On iPad: show self portraits of Chardin where he has tied colorful scarves on and around his head and appears to have rouge on his cheeks). Women were typically portrayed as flirtatious or childish and sentimental, with soft mischievous delicate smiles. Chardin's work, although classified as Rococo in many of the references used here, really did not reflect these characteristics. Instead he chose to show the everyday life of ordinary people and still lifes using a more earthy palette. His work also had a more dignified or serious tone, especially in his genre scenes. (Stokstad)

According to Tuchman, "Chardin's works convey his warmth, charm and reserve. He portrayed children with the tenderness of a doting grandparent (though he never became one himself) and caressed color onto the contours of fruits as if he were a Dean or Deluca. Unlike his contemporaries, he ignored frivolity and intrigue, depicting instead the simplicity of everyday life. In his works, common objects and scenes are rendered with dignity and seriousness, and the humdrum becomes beguiling. For Philippe de Montebello, the Metropolitan's director, Chardin is "a pure painter whose subject is almost subordinate to the joy of painting." (Tuchman)

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### Current Mia Label Information (optional)

This picture may appear to reproduce the casual clutter of an 18th-century tabletop. Not so. Chardin carefully selected objects to convey specific meanings. A palette with brushes, placed atop a paint box, symbolizes the art of painting. Building plans, spread beneath drafting and surveying tools, represent architecture. An ornate bronze pitcher alludes to goldsmithing, and the red portfolio symbolizes

drawing. The plaster model of J. B. Pigalle's Mercury, an actual work by a friend of Chardin's, stands for sculpture.

The cross on a ribbon is the Order of Saint Michael, the highest honor an artist could then receive. Pigalle was the first sculptor to win it. So this painting sends multiple messages: it presents emblems of the arts and of artists' glory and honors a specific artist, Pigalle.

A still life (or painting of objects), which is composed from scratch by its creator, can be used to convey complex meanings.

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## Sources of Information and/or Prop Ideas (photos/videos)

Artsmia.org, Label

Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean-Baptiste-Siméon\\_Chardin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean-Baptiste-Siméon_Chardin)

Jean-Baptiste Pigalle: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean-Baptiste\\_Pigalle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean-Baptiste_Pigalle)

Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jean-Baptiste-Simeon-Chardin>

The Quiet Mastery of Jean-Simeon Chardin by Phyllis Tuchman, Smithsonian, June 2000:  
<http://www.phs.poteau.k12.ok.us/williams/APAH/readings/The%20Quiet%20Mastery%20of%20Chardin,%20Smithsonian.pdf>

Stokstad and Cothorn, *Art History*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed., Rococo, pages 907-913.

### Images:

Chardin, The Laundress: <https://www.arthermitage.org/Jean-Simeon-Chardin/Laundress.html>

Chardin, The House of Cards: <https://www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/Collection/art-object-page.97.html>

Self-portrait from the Louvre, Paris and self-portrait from the Fine Art Museum, Orleans

Here is a repainted park bench in Washburn-Fair Oaks park across the street from Mia, that was inspired by Chardin's painting. For the full story on the park benches:

<https://new.artsmia.org/stories/sitting-on-art-the-story-behind-the-washburn-fair-oaks-park-benches/>

