



## *Reconsidering the rococo : 18<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>th</sup> Centuries*

Symposium, University of Lausanne, 5-6 november 2015

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Despite the scepticism or irony which it provokes, the notion of the Rococo occupies a central position within the historiography of 18th-century art. It structures our understanding of this epoch and determines the way in which we see it. This symposium, planned as an answer to the stimulating research of the last twenty years on the Rococo, aims at an epistemological reflection on a protean notion which was progressively defined as a style during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The Rococo – which is often associated with the supposed frivolity of the 18th century – is regularly described as a capricious, sensual, anti-vitruvian artistic phenomenon without any coherent theoretical grounding. Alternately presented as progressive – even transgressive – or retrograde, profane or religious, the Rococo is always a place of contradictions. In order to avoid its moral, political and cultural connotations, some art historians attempt to define it only by its formal aspects. In the history of styles, the Rococo is often set against Neoclassicism and entertains an unclear relationship with the Baroque. Is it fundamentally different from the latter ? Might it be the Baroque's last phase, its fulfilment or its decline ? Its origin is also the object of vivid debate : while it is generally agreed that the Rococo first appeared in France, some authors have stated that it only reached its full development in Germany.

This symposium therefore favours a critical approach to this notion, urging contributors to reconsider how it emerged, how it was formed and diffused. What were the first manifestations of the Rococo, on what preconceived ideas was it founded, and how did it become a formal and aesthetic canon? Which sources did it draw upon ? What ideas and categories have been used to structure it ? How were the boundaries of the Rococo established ? The different objects which have been brought together through this classification can be linked to many discourses of their time, notably those concerning the *inventio* and the *caprice*. However, those same objects also caused many reactions : a large proportion of these, from the 18th century on, were negative, as is exemplified in famous texts by Abbé Le Blanc and Cochin. How have art historians interpreted these discourses ? What simplifications, anachronisms, projections or prejudices does this attempt to describe 18th-century art reflect ? How has the context in which interpreters have written about the Rococo oriented the formulation of narratives during the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries ? How have the ideas upon which their work is founded inflected the production of imitations of 18th-century objects ? How have these revivals, in turn, acted upon our understanding of the Rococo ?

These questions – as well as many other similar ones – can be used as a framework for the presentations. As the reader will have understood by now, this symposium will not attempt to define the characteristics of a style, nor to determine an essence of the Rococo, but to reflect on the manner in which a notion has been – and continues to be – perceived.

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Proposals of up to 300 words – to which a brief resumé and a list of publications should be joined – can be sent to [carl.magnusson@unil.ch](mailto:carl.magnusson@unil.ch) and [marie-pauline.martin@univ-amu.fr](mailto:marie-pauline.martin@univ-amu.fr) until 30<sup>th</sup> June 2015. Travel and lodging expenses will be covered by the University of Lausanne

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