

FELIBIEN'S HIERARCHY

Included in the Preface of "Conférences de l'Académie Royale de Peintre et de Sculpture pendant l'année 1667" (published 1669).

1. Monsters and Grotesques

Those things which have no equivalent in Nature; "fantastic fantasies" as one 17th-century theorist put it; man's imagination allowed to run uncontrolled, without the discipline of reason.

2. Things manufactured by man

That which is most commonplace and base, and deprived of life; inherently imperfect since subject to decay.

3. Still life objects: fruits, flowers, shells, etc.

That which is living, but deprived of any human value; representation of such matter is merely the mechanical exercise of imitating what the eye sees.

4. Landscapes

Man still not introduced; again, as with category 3, the simple mechanical recording of surface appearances of nature.

5. Genre scenes: representations of scenes from everyday life.

Man introduced for the first time; the possibility exists for movement and action; such actions, however, are of the most ordinary and base sort.

6. Portraits

Man unquestionably the center of interest; still not highest perfection in art, though, since figure is isolated and not engaged in noble human action involving numerous figures.

7. Groups of figures involved in a history or fable

Man's grand actions; allowed the painter to represent noble human character and high purpose ("history painting" was thought to include subjects drawn from 1) Biblical history 2) mythological history and 3) recorded history

8. Allegories of great virtue or great mysteries

Not easily distinguishable from category 7); the most grandiose of all types of painting, since meanings go beyond the mere narrative or action and convey profound human truths; mysteries of the Church (revealed truths), such as the Resurrection or the Eucharist, which cannot be grasped by reason and which must be accepted by faith, would be a part of category 8).