

Language through Art: An ESL Enrichment Curriculum (Beginning) Information for Teaching

Dance Before a Fountain

Nicolas Lancret (French, 1690–1743)
About 1730–35
Oil on canvas
37 13/16 x 54 5/16 in.
2001.54



Background Information

In a luxuriant park adorned with a monumental fountain, two couples perform a country dance, accompanied by the music of a rustic bagpipe. On either side, other couples play out the game of love in its various stages of anticipation, entreaty, and reward.

Lancret's subject was an invention of the 1700s. Called a *fête galante*, this type of painting depicted a landscape peopled by elegant figures strolling, making music, or attempting to woo their partners. Participants of the *fête galante* seemed uninhibited by the stiff conventions of formal society.

Lancret's fluid brushstrokes are evident in the shimmering highlights of the costumes and in the play of their opulent colors against the harmony of the landscape background. The painting's relatively large size (over 3 x 4 ft.) suggests that it was commissioned by a prominent collector, possibly an aristocratic patron or member of French royalty.

About the Artist

Nicolas Lancret (French, 1690–1743)

Lancret's early career never indicated his future renown as Paris's best-known practitioner of the *fête galante*. After training as an engraver, he apprenticed to a moderately successful history painter. By 1708 he was studying at the Académie Royale, from which he was expelled for bad behavior. Probably because of the popularity of fellow artist Jean-Antoine Watteau's elegant new *fêtes galante*, Lancret chose to join the workshop of Watteau's teacher Claude Gillot.

By 1719, Lancret was an Académie Royale member in the *fête galante* category. His commercial success exploded in the early 1720s, after Watteau's and Gillot's deaths made him the leading source for such pictures. Under Louis XV's enthusiastic patronage, Lancret's paintings adorned the walls of numerous royal residences, including Versailles.