

LOUIS STYLE

French Frames

1610–1792

SEPTEMBER 15, 2015–JANUARY 3, 2016

What makes a frame French?

Discover the styles and techniques of
French master carvers and gilders.

This magnificent frame, a work of art in its own right, weighing 297 pounds, exemplifies French style under Louis XV (reigned 1723–1774). Fashioned by an unknown designer, perhaps after designs by Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier (French, 1695–1750), and several specialist craftsmen in Paris about 1740, it was commissioned by Gabriel Bernard de Rieux, a powerful French legal official, to accentuate his exceptionally large pastel portrait and its heavy sheet of protective glass. On this grand scale, the sweeping contours and luxuriously carved ornaments in the corners and at the center of each side achieve the thrilling effect of sculpture. At the top, a spectacular cartouche between festoons of flowers surmounted by a plume of foliage contains attributes symbolizing the fair judgment of the sitter: justice (represented by a scale and a book of laws) and prudence (a snake and a mirror).

PA.205

LOUIS STYLE

French Frames

1610–1792

Frames are essential to the presentation of paintings. They protect the image and permit its attachment to the wall. Through the powerful combination of form and finish, frames profoundly enhance (or detract) from a painting's visual impact.

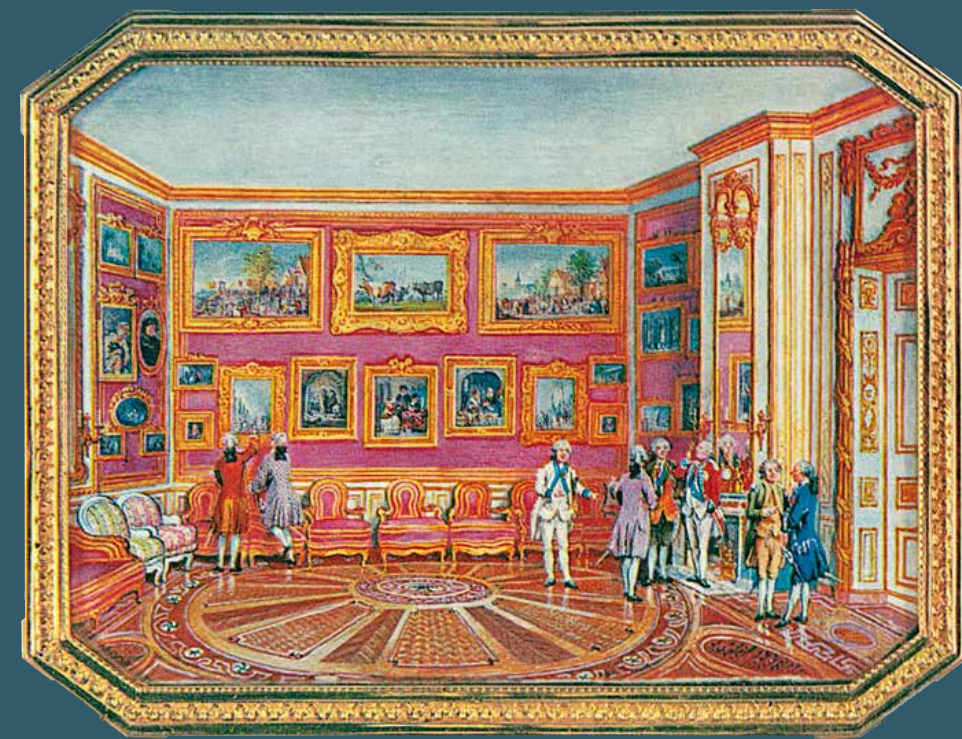
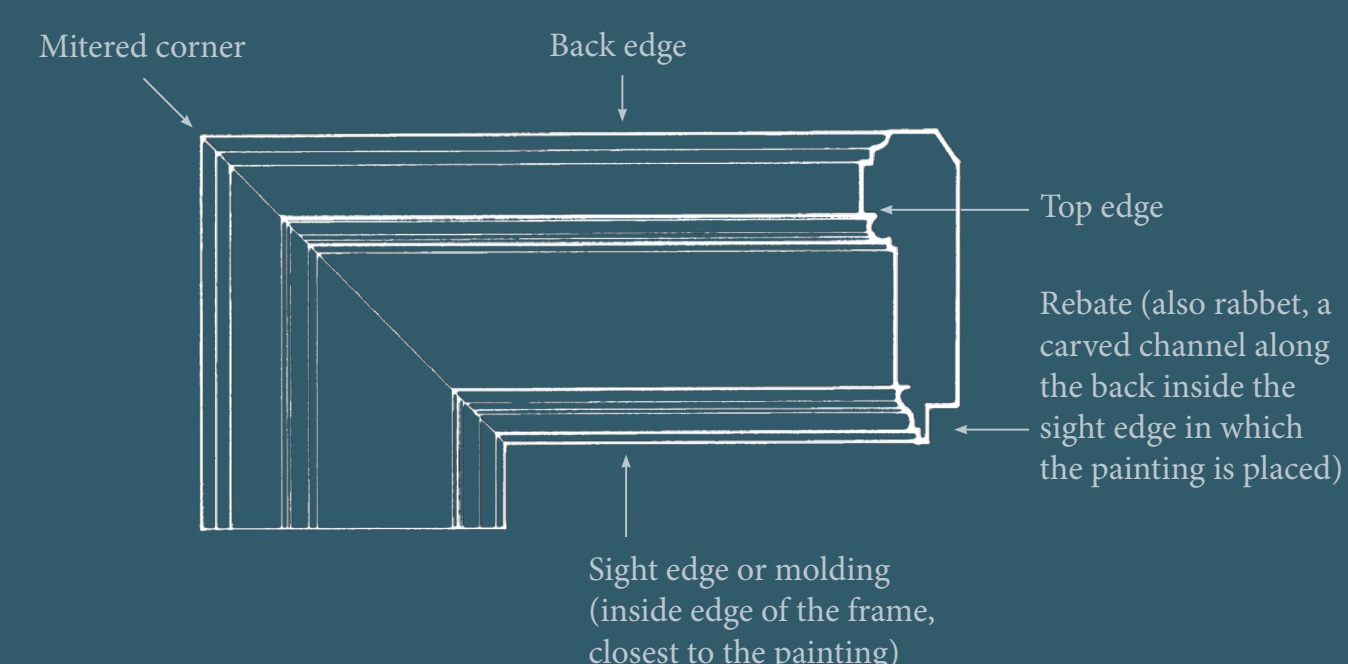


Fig. 1: *Tabatière* (snuff box), about 1770. Luis Roussel (French, died 1787), goldsmith; Louis-Nicolas van Blarenberghe (French, 1716–1794), miniaturist. Underside panel with a view of the interior of the *premier cabinet* of the Hotel Chateaufort, Paris, with some of the owner's largest and most important paintings, mostly seventeenth-century Dutch. Private collection. Reproduced larger than actual size, from A. Kenneth Snowman, *Eighteenth-Century Gold Boxes of Europe* (Faber and Faber, 1968).

The early 1600s through the 1700s was a golden age for frame making in Paris during which functional surrounds for paintings became expressions of artistry, innovation, taste, and wealth. The primary stylistic trendsetter was the sovereign, whose desire for increasingly opulent forms of display spurred the creative efforts of brilliant designers and craftsmen to ever more magnificent expressions of his personal style.

Drawing on the Museum's own collection of antique frames, this exhibition presents an array of French design in wall furniture under four kings: from the simple moldings and Italian-inspired ornament in the time of Louis XIII, to opulent carved and gilded masterpieces that were extensions of sumptuous interior decorative schemes in the age of Louis XIV and Louis XV, to the late reactive return to simplicity during the reign of Louis XVI. Standard designs and sizes suitable for middle-class homes hang alongside exceptional commissions, such as the frames outside the gallery and on the central wall, which represent the height of artistic and technical skill of French frame making.

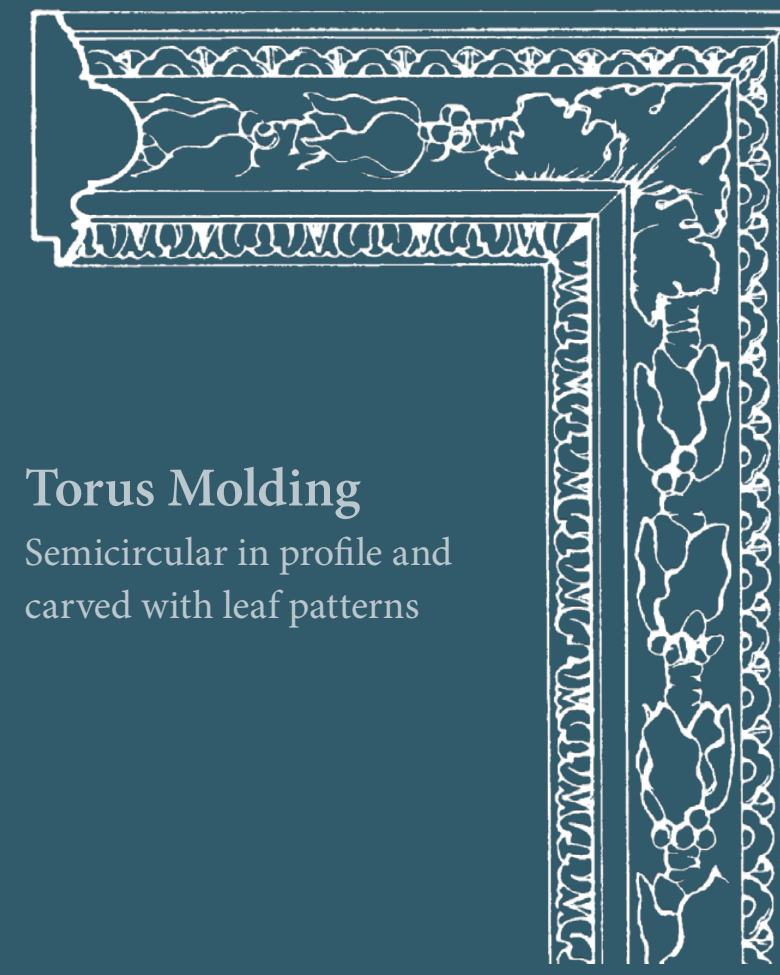


All of the frames in this gallery are made of carved, gessoed, and gilded oak by unknown craftsmen in Paris, unless otherwise noted.



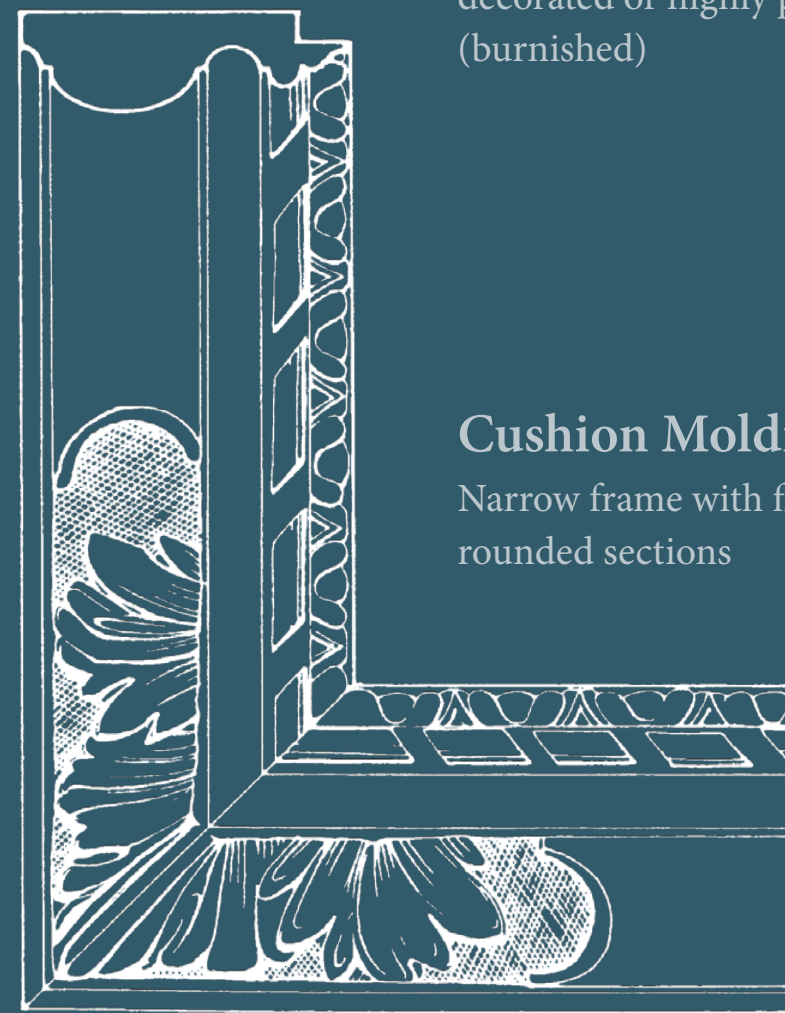
Hollow

Concave section of a molding between ornaments that can be decorated or highly polished (burnished)



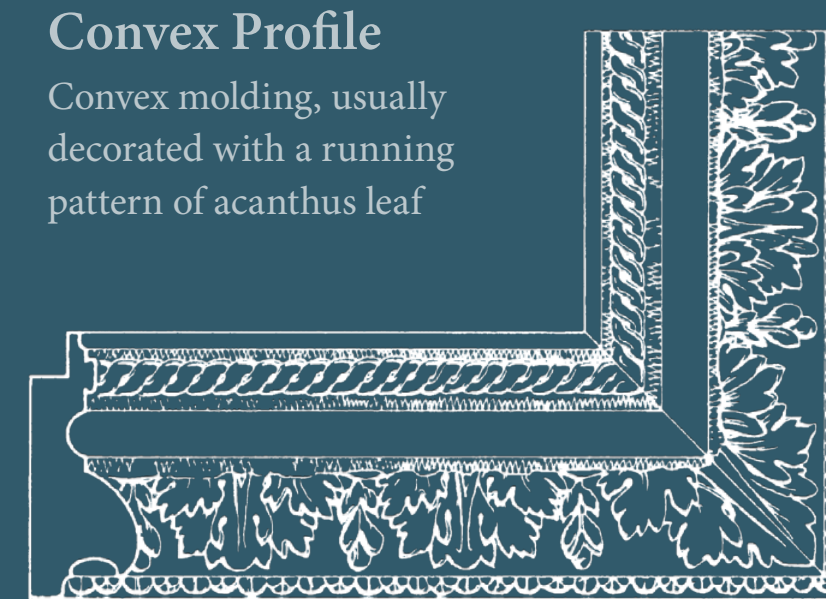
Torus Molding

Semicircular in profile and carved with leaf patterns



Cushion Molding

Narrow frame with flattish, rounded sections



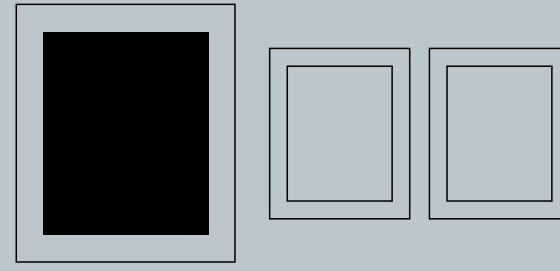
Convex Profile

Convex molding, usually decorated with a running pattern of acanthus leaf

LOUIS XIII

1610–1643

The first unified style for frames emerged in France during the reign of Louis XIII and was predominantly Italian in origin. The influence of Bolognese and Florentine modes, introduced by the Italian queens Caterina de' Medici (reigned 1547–1549) and Marie de' Medici (reigned 1610), mother and regent (1610–17) for the young Louis XIII, and the craftsmen they brought with them to France, shaped a classicizing style featuring carved acanthus leaves perpendicular to the convex molding and across the corners of the cushion molding. The second and most common style was the torus section richly carved with garlands of laurel or oak leaves, often combined with flowers and berries influenced by decorative treatments of ceiling and door moldings. Frames of the mid-1600s perpetuated motifs derived from the classical past and nature and also inaugurated features that would characterize French frames for the next century: finely detailed carving, patterns running across all sides of the frame, and rhythmical varied finishes that combined traditional ornament with refined workmanship.



Portrait of a Young Man in Military Costume

1650

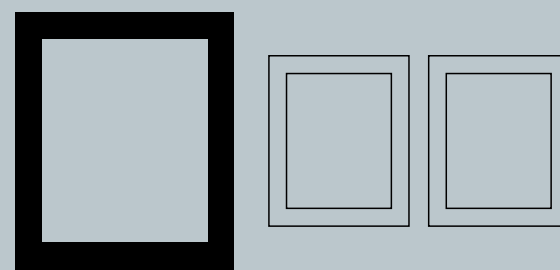
Bartholomeus van der Helst

Dutch, Haarlem 1613–Amsterdam 1670

Oil on canvas

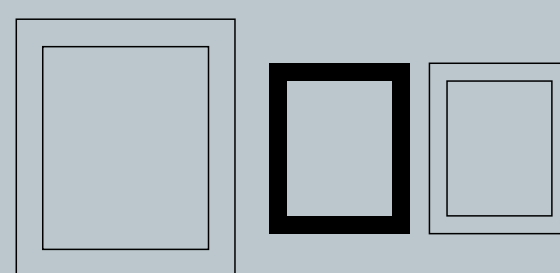
Bartholomeus van der Helst was one of the leading portrait painters in Amsterdam, along with Rembrandt. Here, he depicted an unknown man who literally wears his wealth and social position on his sleeve. Van der Helst meticulously re-created the glitter of gold thread in the extravagant trimmings of his fashionable black attire. With an elegant gesture of invitation, which serves to display the gloves with elongated tips, the sitter engages the viewer.

70.PA.12



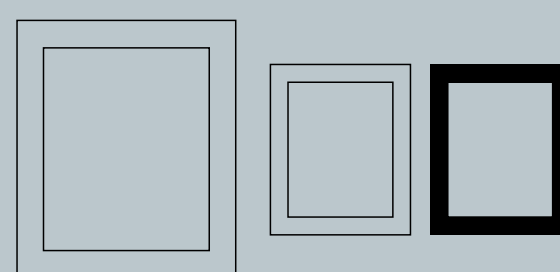
This is a beautiful and characteristic Louis XIII torus molding, ornamented with **lamb's-tongue**, a **ribbon-twist** sight molding, and alternating motifs of **laurel and berry** as well as oak leaves and acorns. Dutch paintings from the late seventeenth century were often framed with gilded moldings, in keeping with the taste for French court style in the Netherlands. Superbly carved and gilded, it complements the metal decoration of the sitter's costume and reflects light into the portrait.

PA.185



This fine cushion frame is one of a pair with PA.61 (right) and retains both its original size and gilding. **Acanthus** leaves on a crosshatched ground decorate the centers and corners. The sight edge is carved with a **twisted-ribbon** and leaf running pattern and hazzle (zigzag pattern) ornament on both sides as well as on the outside edge of the frame.

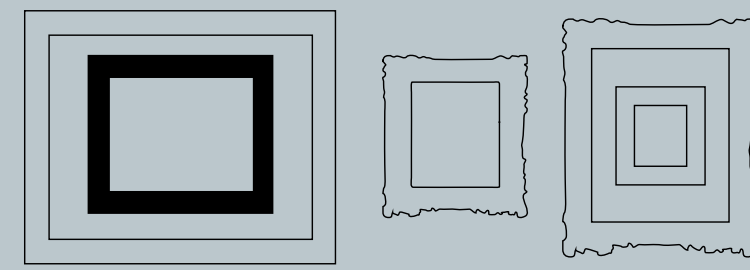
PA.60



This cushion frame is one of a pair with PA.60 (at left) and retains its original size. Here, the back shows the construction typical of French frames of the 1600s and 1700s, notably miter joints, visible in the corners. A tapered piece of wood (spline) inserted through the back of the frame, diagonally across the corner, connects both sides of the joint and reinforces it.

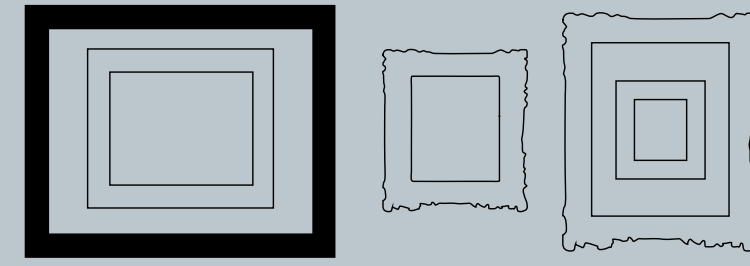
PA.61

TOP ROW



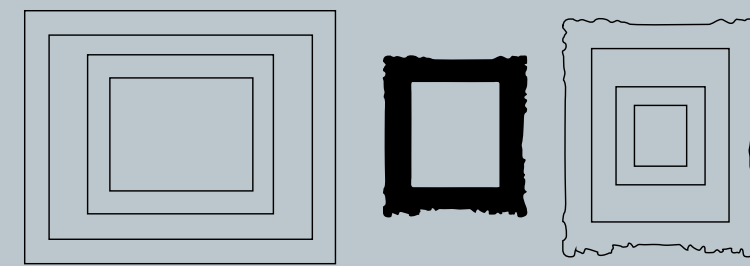
This frame features several types of distinctive Louis XIII ornamentation. The **laurel, berry**, and flower running pattern carved into the torus molding are highly characteristic, as are the **acanthus-leaf** corner ornaments and decorative hazzling on the outside edge of the **twisted-ribbon** molding and along the back edge. The frame retains its original size and gilding.

PA.3



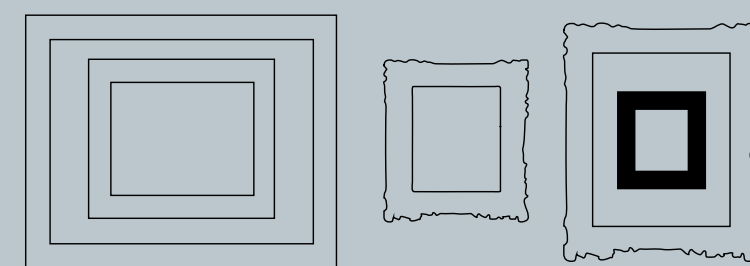
This large frame retains its original size and gilding. It features a typical carved running (repeated) pattern of stiff **acanthus leaf**, which is separated from the carved-leaf sight edge by a burnished hollow.

PA.5



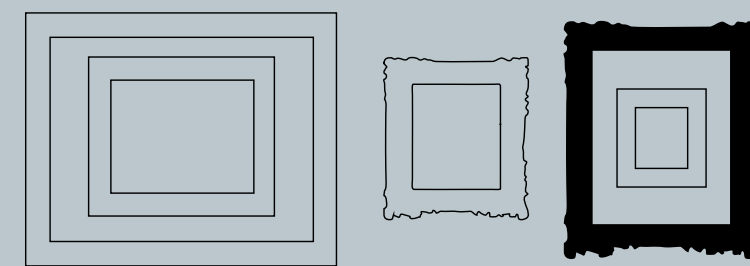
This is a transitional frame in both form and ornament, combining elements of Louis XIII and Louis XIV styles. The use of exuberant floral ornament, including the sunflower, symbol of Louis XIV, and the crosshatched background heralds a new era of decoration during the reign of the Sun King. The convex molding is separated from the carved sight edge by a gilded hollow. The frame retains its original size and gilding.

PA.166



This torus molding has been carved with ornamentation representative of the Louis XIII period. The **laurel, berry**, and flower running (repeated) pattern complements the **carved-leaf** running pattern sight edge with hazzling (zigzag pattern). **Acanthus-leaf** ornaments decorate the corners and a hollow separates the torus molding from the **twisted-ribbon** and leaf back edge with hazzle ornament. The frame has been reduced in size, and the gilding has been heavily restored.

PA.685



The shape of the molding between the corner elements is characteristic of frames from the Louis XIII period, while the raised corners with floral ornaments, including the sunflower, symbol of the Sun King, are associated with Louis XIV's reign. The shape of the convex molding resembles the stiff-leaf pattern frames of the earlier period, such as PA.5 nearby. The sight edge has a scrolling-leaf running pattern on a hazzled (zigzag pattern) background. A gilded hollow separates the sight edge from the carved convex molding. The frame retains its original size and gilding.

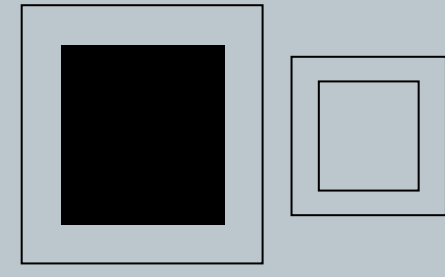
PA.684



LOUIS XIV

1643–1715

During the course of his long reign, Louis XIV, known as the Sun King, transformed the monarchy and initiated a golden age in which the arts flourished. His obsession with magnificent display, and the impact of government regulation of royal craftsmen, created a royal Baroque style. Architecture, the decorative arts, furniture, and ornament were shaped by the sovereign's taste and were implemented in a unified fashion, as at the spectacular palace of Versailles. Frames made during the early period of his reign continued Louis XIII motifs but in a more dynamic and elaborate manner: raised corners and floral motifs, notably the sunflower, symbol of the Sun King, are associated with this transitional style. Center and corner style frames are characteristic of mature Louis XIV style. While the decoration of frames was highly varied, two main types prevailed: straight sides with projecting corner cartouches and a continuation of the torus section with carved corner ornamentation.



The Satyr and the Peasant Family

About 1660–62

Jan Steen

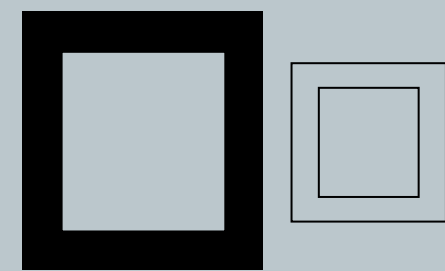
Dutch, Leiden 1626–Leiden 1679

Oil on canvas

Jan Steen brought a keen wit to the representation of families and parables. This scene depicts a fable by the Greek writer Aesop (about 620–564 BCE). A satyr, a demigod, notes that the mortal peasant blows on his hands to warm them and on his soup to cool it. Distrusting anyone who blows both hot and cold air with the same breath, he abruptly takes his leave. Small-scale, finely executed Dutch paintings of this period were avidly collected in France in the 1700s. This elegant frame would have complemented other furnishings.

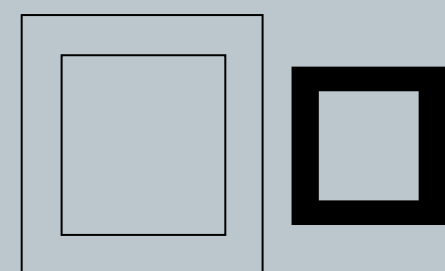
Formerly the property of the Philippson family of Brussels, looted by the Nazis, purchased by the Museum in 1969, and owned by the Museum pursuant to an agreement with the Philippson family in 2003

69.PA.15



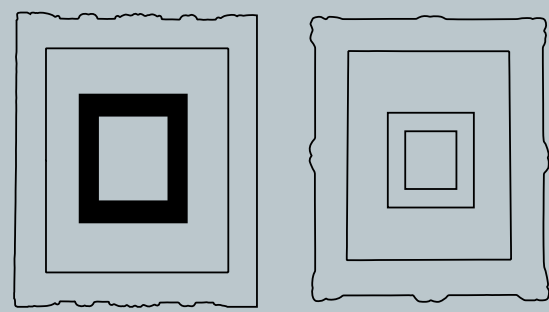
This ogee frame is a superb example of the Louis XIV style. Floral scrolling and **strapwork** links the center and corner ornaments. A **sanded** flat band separates these more robust carved elements from the delicate **lamb's-tongue** sight edge.

PA.180



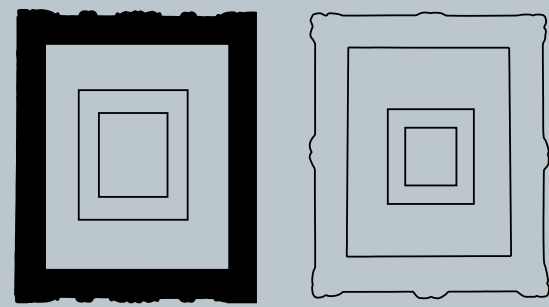
The **strapwork** and delightful small flowers and foliage on a crosshatched background that animates the surface of this small frame would have perfectly complemented textiles with similar patterns from nature found in tasteful Louis XIV interiors. **Acanthus-leaf** corner ornament and a **husk-and-leaf** sight edge complete the delicate effect. While the frame size is original, the gilding has been repaired.

PA.7



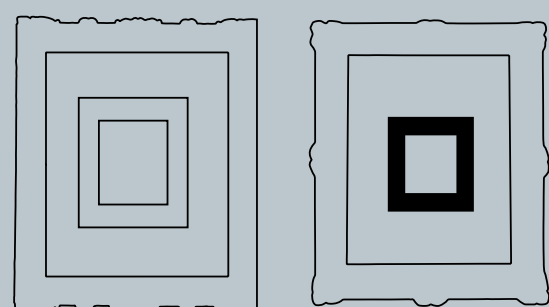
The essential elements of Louis XIV style, such as the corner and center ornaments with a leaf pattern and the scrolling forms of **strapwork** on a crosshatched background, were used even on small frames like this one. The floral demi-center ornaments include projecting sunflowers, an emblem of Louis XIV, the Sun King. A **sanded** flat band separates the convex frame from the carved sight molding. The frame retains its original size and gilding.

DF63



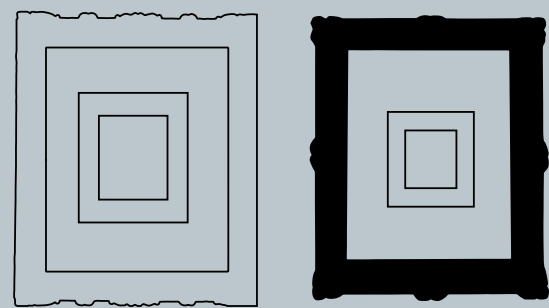
In this characteristic example, the corner and center ornaments feature a leaf pattern, linked by **strapwork** on a crosshatched background. The floral demi-center ornament with a diaper pattern (small repeated diamond shapes) seen here was often used for very large frames. A **sanded** flat band, another feature common to the Louis XIV style, separates the convex frame from the carved sight molding. The frame retains its original size.

PA.119



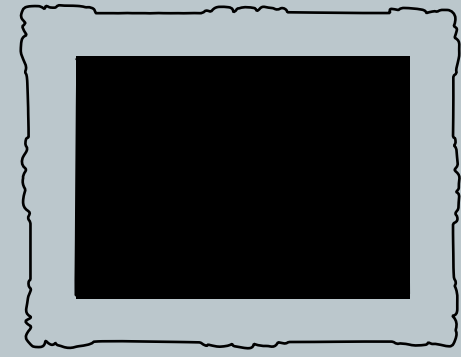
The simplified treatment of this small frame features typical Louis XIV-style ornament of **strapwork** on a crosshatched background and leaf sight edge. The frame retains its original size and gilding.

PA.4



Fleurs-de-lis (stylized lilies representing French royalty that frequently adorn Louis XIV-style frames) are used as the corner and center ornaments. Running **strapwork** on a crosshatched background decorates the main fields of the ogee molding, and a flat band separates the sight edge carved in a wave pattern. The frame retains its original size and gilding.

PA.402



View of Duurstede Castle

1649

Jan van Goyen

Dutch, Leiden 1596–The Hague 1656

Oil on panel

Van Goyen's monochrome color palette and soft, diffused light are characteristic of the Dutch tonal landscape style. Duurstede Castle was the former residence of the bishop of Utrecht on the bank of the Lek River. Abandoned during the Eighty Years' War (1568–1648), the fortress is depicted as an evocative ruin.

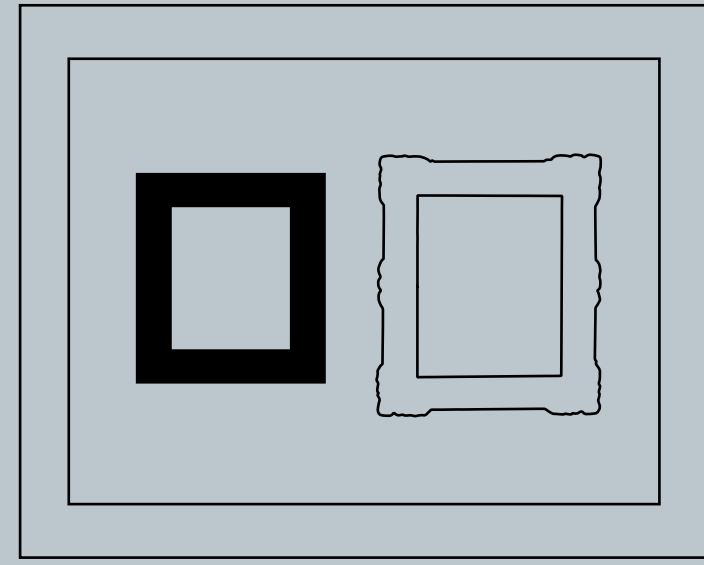
78.PB.198



The elegant form and decoration of this typical Louis XIV frame ensured its versatility. Floral scrolls and **strapwork** decoration bridge the center ornaments featuring a scallop shell—a common motif. The raised corner decorations are also characteristic of the period, as is the **sanded** flat band separating them from the refined **dentil** sight edge. The frame, with the warm color of its original gilding and rhythmic ornament, was selected to complement the tonality and brushwork of Van Goyen's painting.

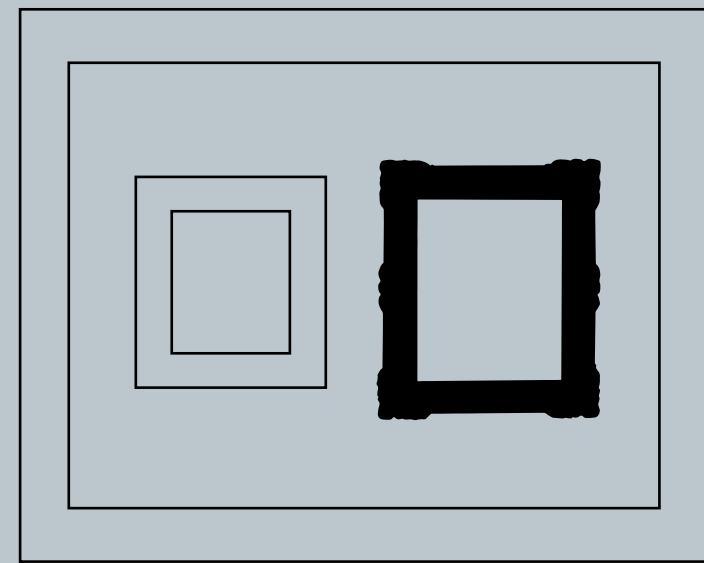
PA.255

TOP ROW



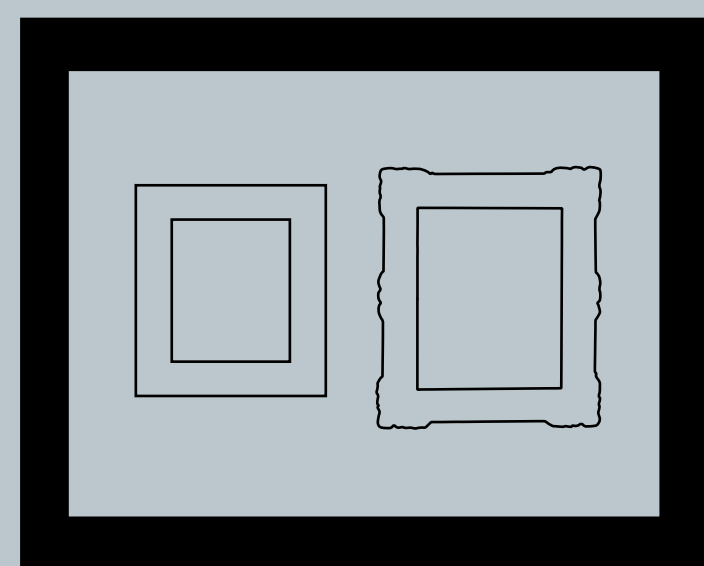
Playful scrolling leaves and flowers form a running pattern on a hazzled (zigzag pattern) background creating decorative texture. As in other frames of the period, broad **acanthus** leaves ornament the corners. A **dentil** pattern articulates the sight edge.

PA.86



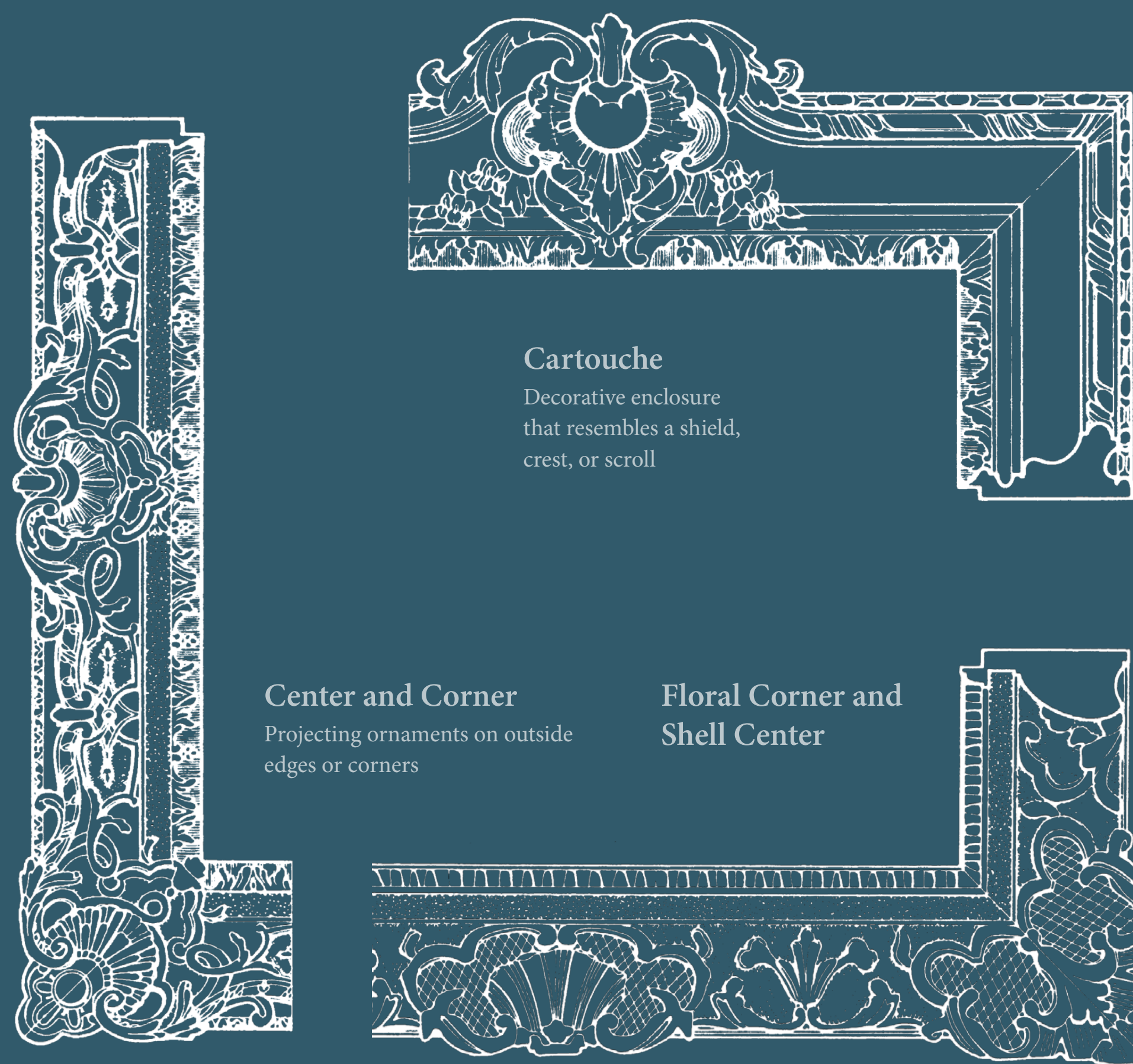
The corner and center ornaments with a leaf pattern and **strapwork** on a crosshatched background are the key features of this typical Louis XIV frame, which retains its original dimensions. A **sanded** band separates the convex frame from the carved sight molding.

PA.102



This handsome large frame is suitable for a painting of a history subject or still life. Alternating **acanthus-leaf** and flower ornaments cover a D-shaped molding decorated with a crosshatched pattern.

PA.682



Cartouche
Decorative enclosure
that resembles a shield,
crest, or scroll

Center and Corner
Projecting ornaments on outside
edges or corners

**Floral Corner and
Shell Center**

RÉGENCE

1715–1723

Louis XV inherited the throne at age five, upon the death of his great-grandfather, the Sun King. His great uncle, Louis Philippe, duc d'Orléans, served as regent of France until the young Louis reached his majority at age thirteen. During this transitional period, a new grace and lightness began to characterize ornament. Frames in the Régence style emphasized center and corner elements, which extend almost organically across the railings and onto the sight edge. In the 1720s, the carving of foliage and shells became increasingly delicate, and linear forms changed to the more fluid and abundant manner of carving associated with the Louis XV era. The process of frame making also became more complex and regulated. Some of the most extraordinary displays of frame design and craftsmanship, in which sculptural detail and a rich variety of finishes achieved splendid heights, resulted in frames equal in sophistication to furniture.

Portrait of Charles de Saint-Albin, Archbishop of Cambrai

1723

Hyacinthe Rigaud

French, Perpignan 1659–Paris 1743

Oil on canvas

Illegitimate son of Philippe II (1674–1723), duc d'Orléans and regent of France, Charles de Saint-Albin (1698–1764) rose quickly in the church and became archbishop of Cambrai in 1723. The same year, he sat for this likeness by Rigaud, the most fashionable portraitist of the French aristocracy. The artist skillfully depicted the diverse textures of shimmering satin, soft ermine, and delicate lace of Saint-Albin's official robes.

88.PA.136

Designed by Gilles-Marie Oppenord

French, Paris 1672–Paris 1742

Possibly carved by Michel Lange

French, active Paris 1710s–1730s

About 1723

Oppenord designed this spectacular gilded-wood frame—a rare survivor from the early 1700s—to amplify the grandeur of Rigaud's portrait of Charles de Saint-Albin. At the top, decorating the central cartouche, appear references to his birth—the crown, three fleurs-de-lis, the eagle, and the sword are all symbols of the French royal bloodline. The hat, tassels crosier, and cross-staff represent the office of cardinal. Oppenord's inventive design and Lange's intricate carving created complex and rich ornamentation featuring acanthus overlapping scales, floret ornament running along sight edge, and pronounced corners with dragons and scallop shells. Matte and shiny finishes enliven its surface. The edges, however, and elaborate coat of arms at the top were cut away at an unknown time, possibly during the French Revolution.

The frame was recently restored in Paris over five years by French artisans trained in the carving and gilding techniques of the 1700s. They reconstructed the lost elements on the basis of an Oppenord drawing for a frame depicting the Saint-Albin family arms (right), including a cardinal's hat that ties the design to the specific sitter.

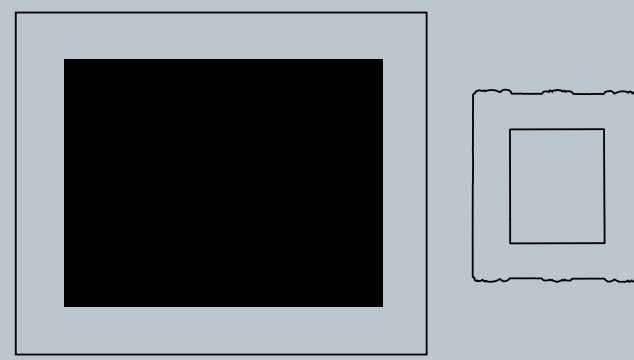
PA.196



Designs for a Picture Frame, about 1730–40. Gilles-Marie Oppenord (French, 1672–1742). Pen and brown ink over traces of black chalk, 38.1 x 29.4 cm (15 x 11 9/16 in.). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Purchase, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund and Joseph Pulitzer Bequest, 1971, 1971.513.83. Image: www.metmuseum.org



The surviving original frame appears in color, while areas of restoration are shown in black and white.



Dido and Aeneas

Early 1700s

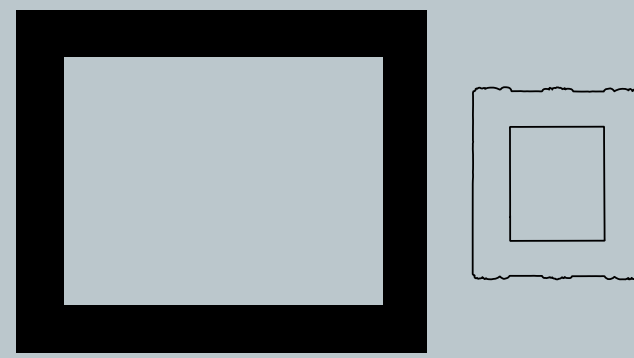
Nicolas Verkolye

Dutch, Delft 1673–Amsterdam 1746

Oil on canvas

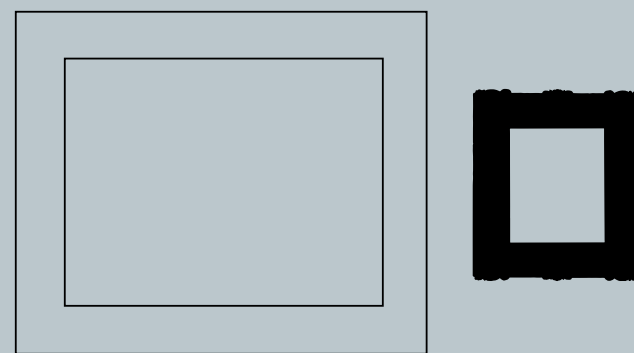
This theatrical scene from *The Aeneid* by the Roman poet Virgil (70–19 BCE) portrays the arrival of the shipwrecked Trojan prince Aeneas at the court of Dido, the legendary queen and founder of the city of Carthage. Venus, who appears in the upper right with Cupid, made Dido fall hopelessly in love with Aeneas. Verkolye conveys the dramatic exchange between Dido and Aeneas with rich color, strong contrasts of light and shadow, and eloquent gestures.

71.PA.66



This splendid frame exemplifies the new freedom of decoration in the Régence period. The pronounced corner and center ornaments are linked by animated scrolling that extends across the molding to the painting itself. These energetic elements contrast with the contained and subtle forms of ornament, notably the **carved-leaf** sight edge and back edge, and **sanded** flat band. The frame retains its original size and gilding.

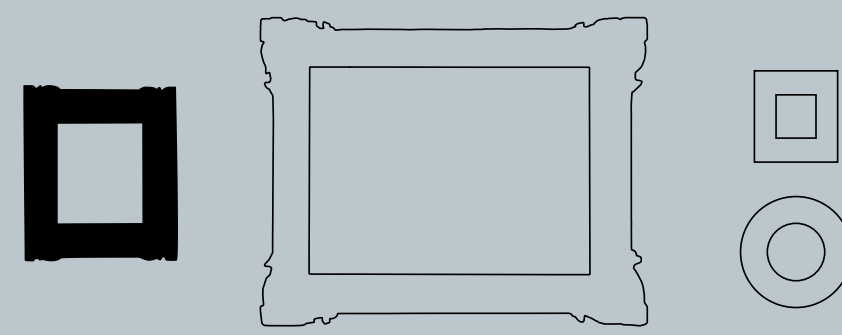
PA.367



Fine, intricate carving distinguishes this frame. In addition to the main floral and **strapwork** corner and center ornaments on a crosshatched background, the decoration includes carved floral elements such as sunflowers, the blossom associated with the king. Some of the ornament has unusual crown-like elements, while the molding also includes more typical types of decoration, such as a **sanded** flat band, carved sight molding, and a back edge adorned with **gadrooning** and a leaf pattern. The frame retains its original size, and the gilding, while original, is very worn.

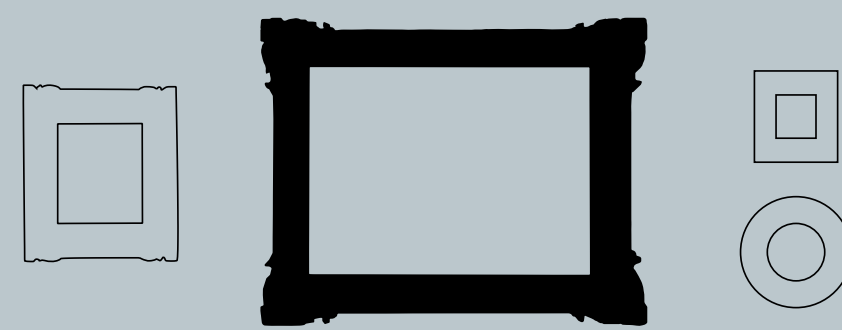
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TOP ROW



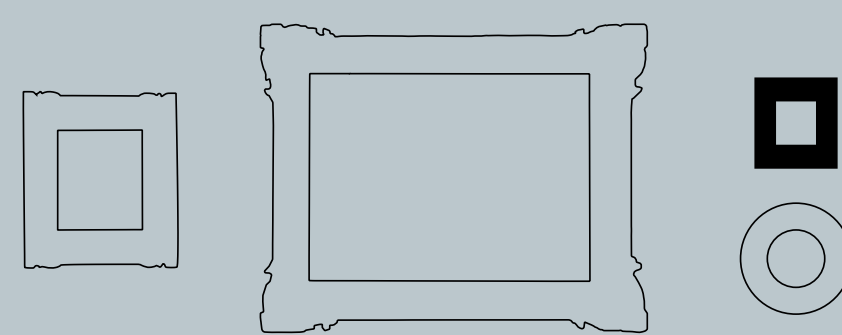
The combination of projecting corner ornaments and straight rails of the ogee frame, features of Régence period style, creates a small frame with big visual impact. The curling forms of floral corner decoration contrasts with the smooth burnished hollow and textured **sanded** band as well as with the rhythmic precision of the carved sight edge and **dentil** pattern running along the back edge. The embellished corners of the frame draw the eye to the central image, which was very likely a portrait.

PA.46



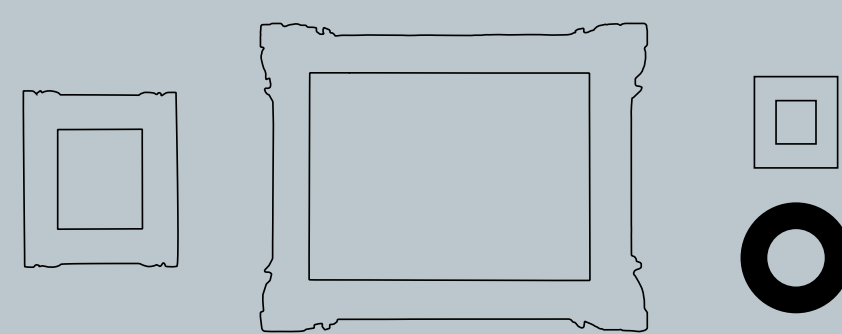
Prominent corner ornaments with a **cabochon** surrounded by scrolling and flowers generate the energetic rhythm characteristic of the Régence style. This example is notable for the high quality of the recarving, in which the gesso coating was sculpted to recover details of the wood below. As a result, the ornamentation possesses great clarity of detail, from the demi-center rosettes and **strapwork** on a crosshatched background to the **acanthus-leaf** sight molding and reeded top rail bound with ribbons to resemble a bundle of stems.

PA.368



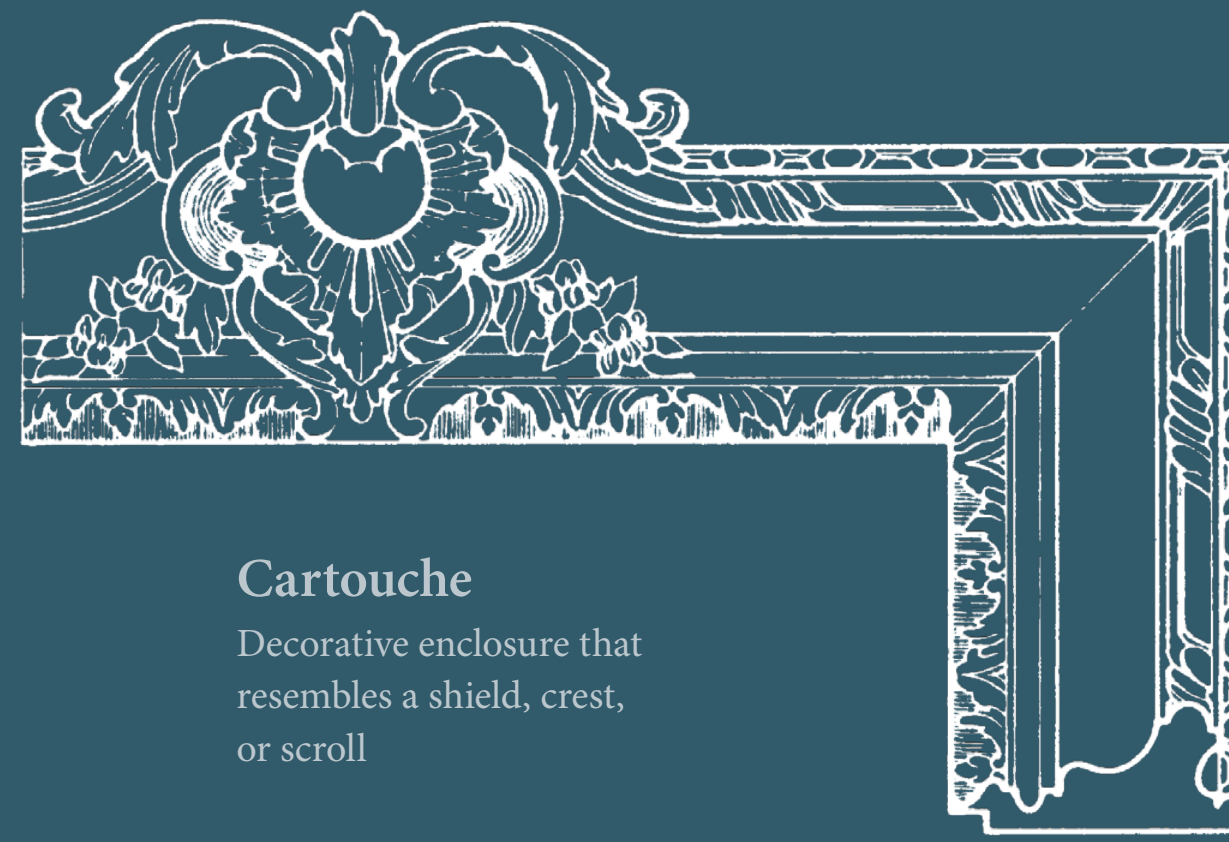
In this typical Régence frame, **cabochon** and floral corner ornaments on a crosshatched ground extend to the sight edge. Delicate scallop-shell center ornaments and a carved sight and back edge complete the delicate surface treatment of this small piece. The frame retains its original size and gilding.

PA.84

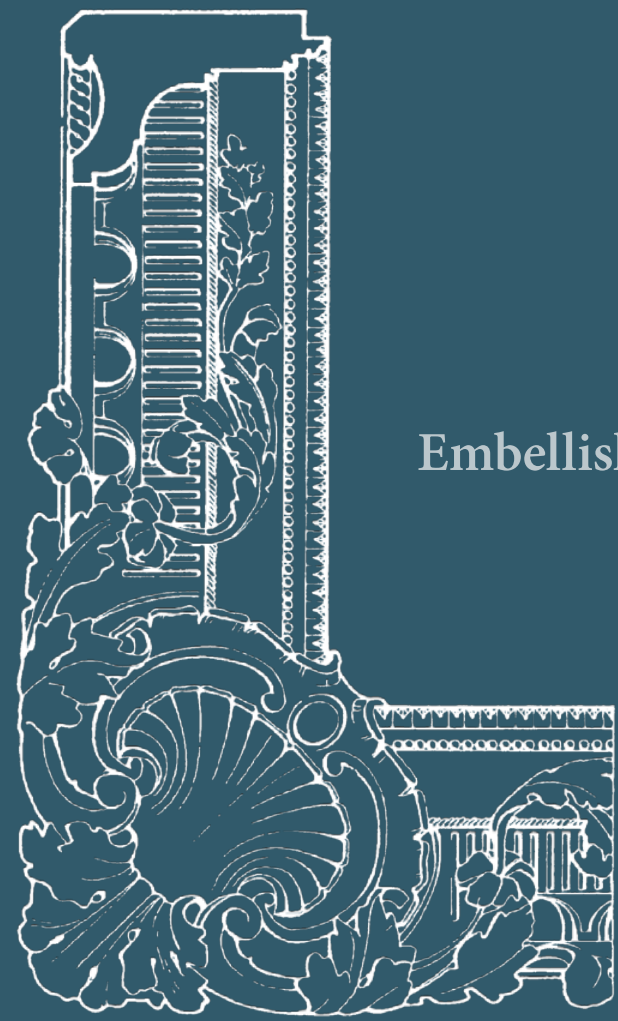


Frames in various shapes were popular during the Régence period. In this charming example, suitable for a small portrait, floral ornamentation, including side ornaments of rosettes and tendrils, enliven an ogee molding. In addition to the **acanthus** sight edge and the **sanded** flat band, the top rail is **gadrooned** and the back edge has a floral molding. The frame retains its original size and gilding.

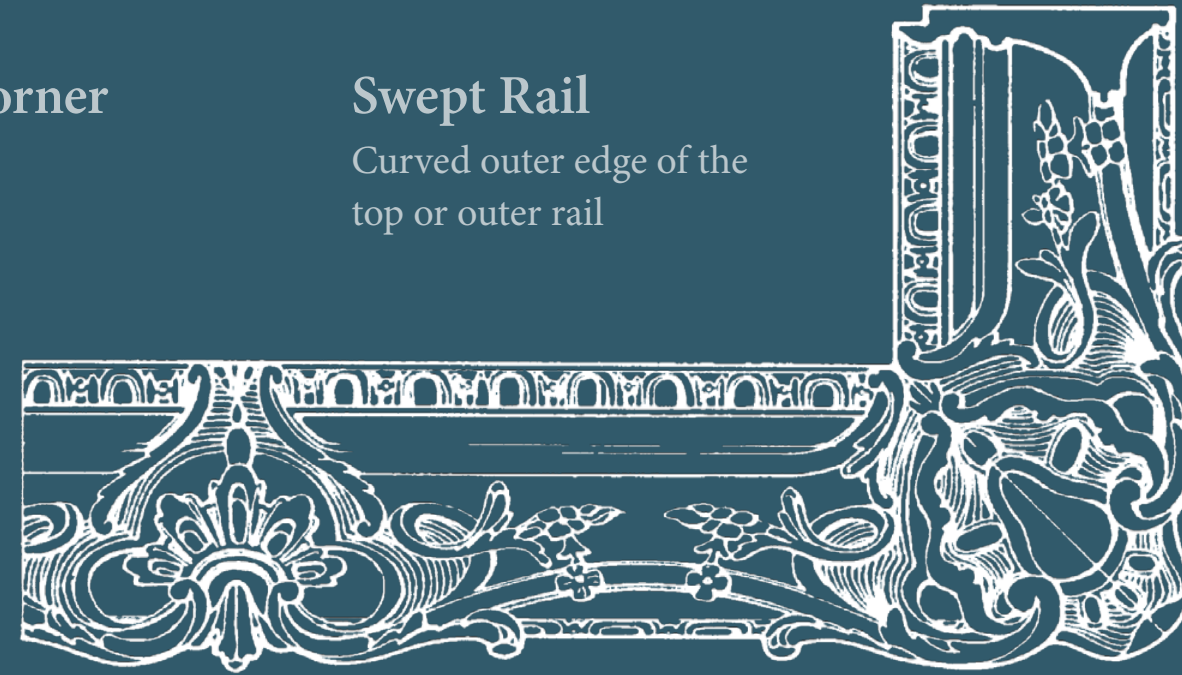
PA.135



Cartouche
Decorative enclosure that resembles a shield, crest, or scroll



Embellished Corner

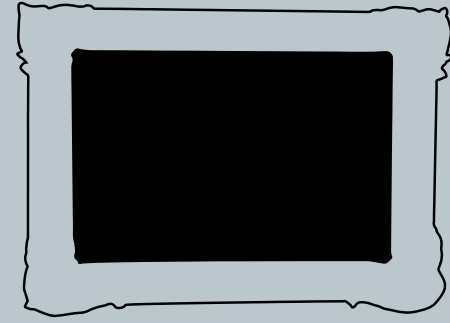


Swept Rail
Curved outer edge of the top or outer rail

LOUIS XV

1723–1774

The relationship between a painting and its frame became very important during the reign of Louis XV, when a new style of energetic and asymmetrical forms drawn from nature known as the Rococo (from *rocaille*, the French word for pebbles) took hold. The swept-rail frame, in which the silhouettes are composed of a series of curves, vividly represented by the huge frame outside the gallery, was the most characteristic style of the period. Ogee section frames are plain or decorated very simply. More elaborate decoration features embellished corners and richly carved cartouches that contrast with the straight rail. A third type of frame features a single, central cartouche or shell flanked by pierced scrolls or flowers. Intense interest in nature and the natural sciences also found expression in specific *rocaille* ornament in the form of stylized shells and rocks. The profusion of exuberant forms and spectacular gilding effects that characterize the Louis XV style eventually fell totally out of fashion.



Market Scene in an Imaginary Oriental Port

About 1764

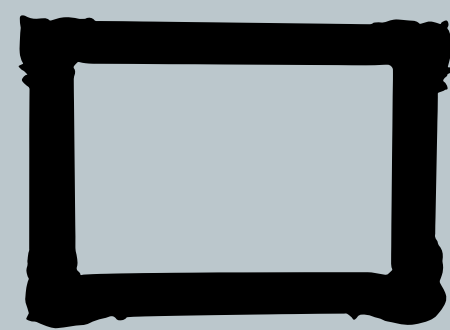
Jean-Baptiste Pillement

French, Lyon 1728–Lyon 1808

Oil on canvas

Most likely a finished sketch for a theater or ballet stage set, this painting transports us to an entirely imagined faraway place. This type of subject was known as *chinoiserie*, which loosely translates as “Chinese-esque.” The term refers to themes that evoke distant lands, such as China, Japan, and the Middle East, which were popular in Europe at the time. Pillement’s fanciful painting celebrates the diversions of a semitropical landscape and French taste for scenes rooted in the pleasures of daily life.

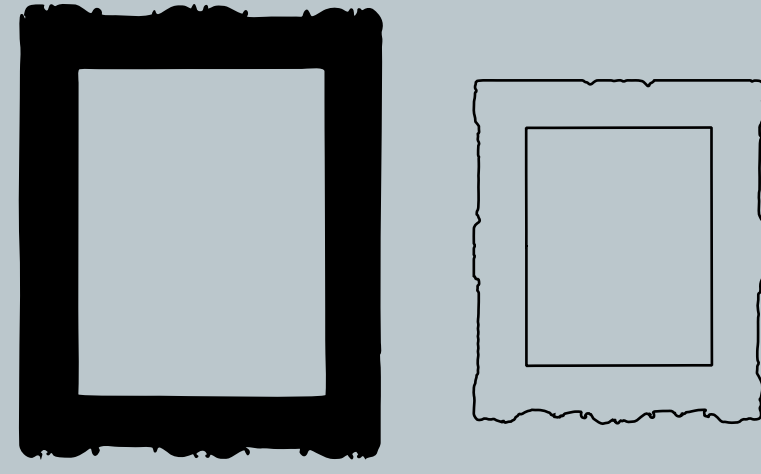
2003.20



The swirling sculptural forms of this frame, which is contemporary to the painting, perpetuates the lively energy of Pillement’s composition. Balanced and luxurious, it typifies the taste for well-designed wall furniture during the Louis XV period. In the corners, elaborate **acanthus** leaves, embellished with flowers between crosshatched panels in a hollow, unfurl toward the center. These expressive elements are linked by a repeating **gadrooned** top edge. A leaf sight molding and a **bead-and-reed** back molding complete the decoration.

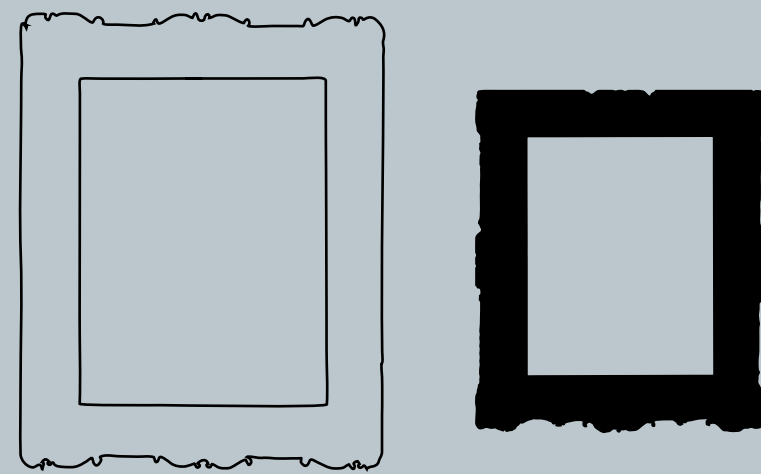
PA.380

TOP ROW



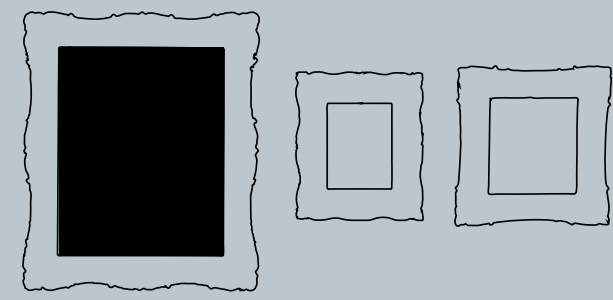
In keeping with the taste for luxurious ornamentation in the mid-eighteenth century, a variety of finely carved motifs have been combined in this example. Pierced floral corner ornaments with scrolling floral tendrils on a diaper-pattern background (small repeated diamond shapes) alternate with similar center ornaments featuring a scallop shell. Simpler treatments, including a **sanded** flat band, **carved-leaf** sight edge, and a **dentil** back edge, define the borders. The frame retains its original size and gilding.

PA.24



This is a characteristic swept-sided frame decorated with floral corner and center ornaments, scrolling tendrils, and perched (raised) demi-centers. The recessed rough surface of the **sanded** flat band contrasts with the rounded forms of the delicate **carved-leaf** sight edge. An outer back edge was added at a later date and carved. The main body of the frame retains its original gilding.

DF.187



Before the Ball

1735

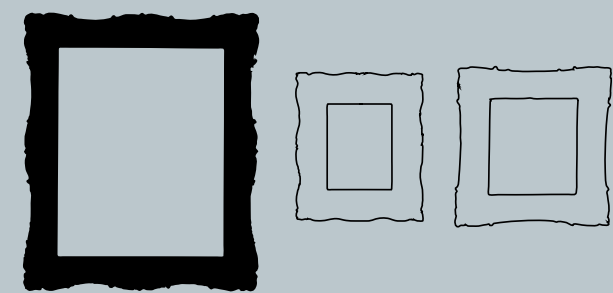
Jean-François de Troy

French, Paris 1679–Rome 1752

Oil on canvas

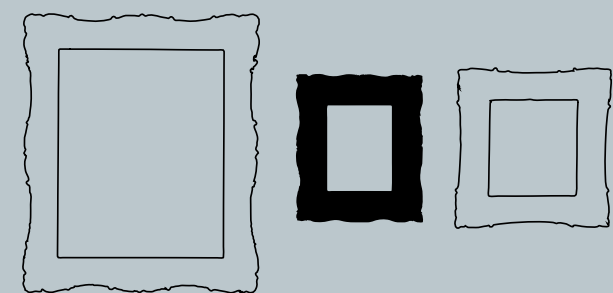
De Troy perfected the category of painting called *tableaux de mode*, depictions of scenes from upper-class life, with an emphasis on sumptuous costumes, rich interiors, and hints of amorous intrigue. In this work, which was exhibited at the Paris Salon in 1737, ball-goers partially disguised by cloaks and masks prepare to depart. Flickering candlelight reflects in the large mirror behind them and illuminates the sweeping gilded curves of its frame and other furniture.

84.PA.668



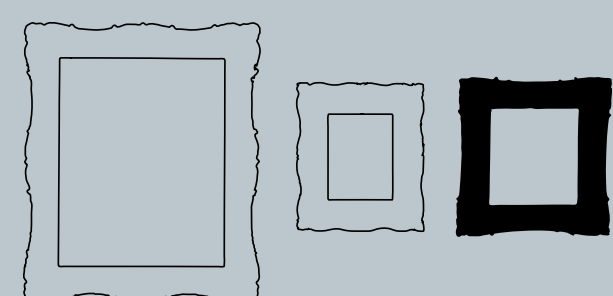
This frame superbly represents the Louis XV style. Chosen by a previous owner of the painting, it complements both De Troy's painterly style as well as the fashionable interior occupied by the figures. A swept top rail and back edge are complemented by scrolling floral-shell center and corner ornaments. The frame retains its original size and gilding.

PA.444



Here, in the most popular and characteristic frame style of the Rococo, swept sides create a series of curves. The floral corner ornaments of this small but exquisite frame are especially characteristic of the Louis XV period. Floral and shell center ornaments, a running **pearl pattern**, and a **lamb's-tongue** complete the ornamentation. The frame retains its original size and gilding.

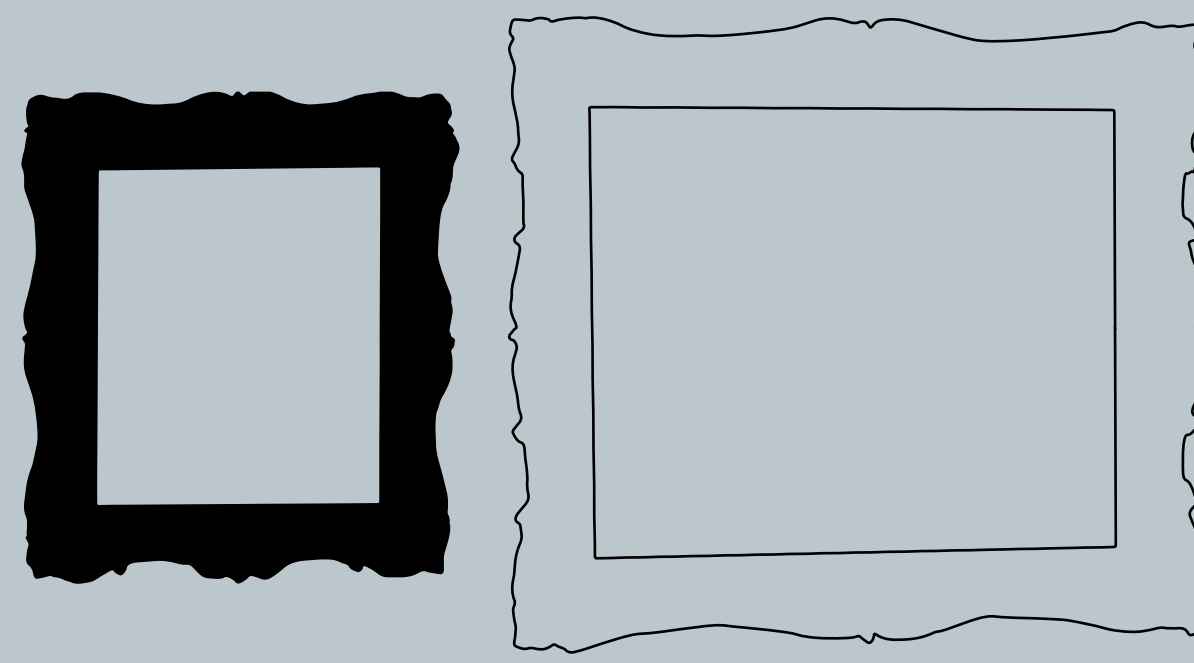
PA.141



In this characteristic Rococo frame, the swept sides continue momentum generated by the elaborate floral and shell corner ornaments with extended floral tendrils on a crosshatched background. A diaper pattern (small repeated diamond shapes) embellishes the area between corner ornaments, and a carved **flute** sight edge defines the interior surface. The frame has been reduced in size.

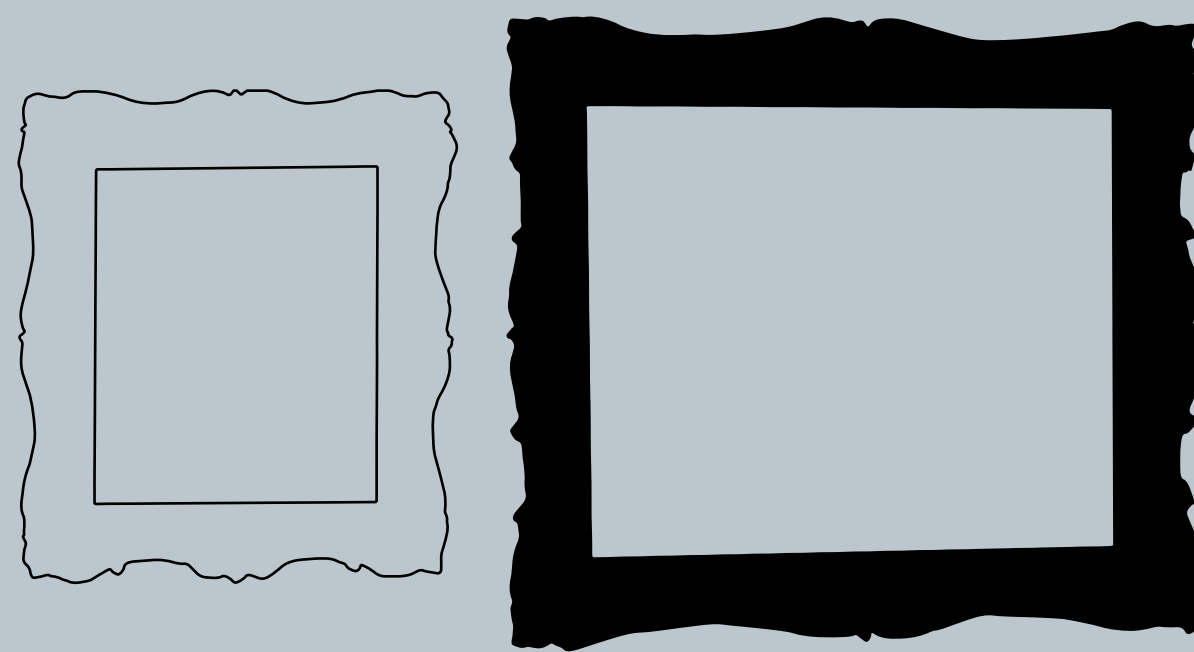
PA.40

TOP ROW



The dynamic swept sides, floral corner ornaments with rosette centers, and floral and shell center ornaments of this frame are key aspects of the Louis XV style. Simpler running motifs, including a **pearl pattern** and a **lamb's-tongue** sight edge and **gadrooned** back edge, animate other areas of the molding. The quality of the carving is notable in this example. The frame retains its original size but has been heavily restored.

PA.447



This typical swept-sided frame features shell corner ornaments with scrolling floral tendrils. The center ornaments of large flowers and stems are set against a diaper-pattern background (small repeated diamond shapes). The delicate **carved-leaf** sight edge contrasts with the bold geometric forms of the **dentil** back edge. Both burnished and matte gilding has been applied to the surface. The frame has been reduced in size.

PA.683

Jean Chérin

French, Paris 1733/34–Paris 1785; master carver,
Académie de Saint Luc August 14, 1760

About 1770

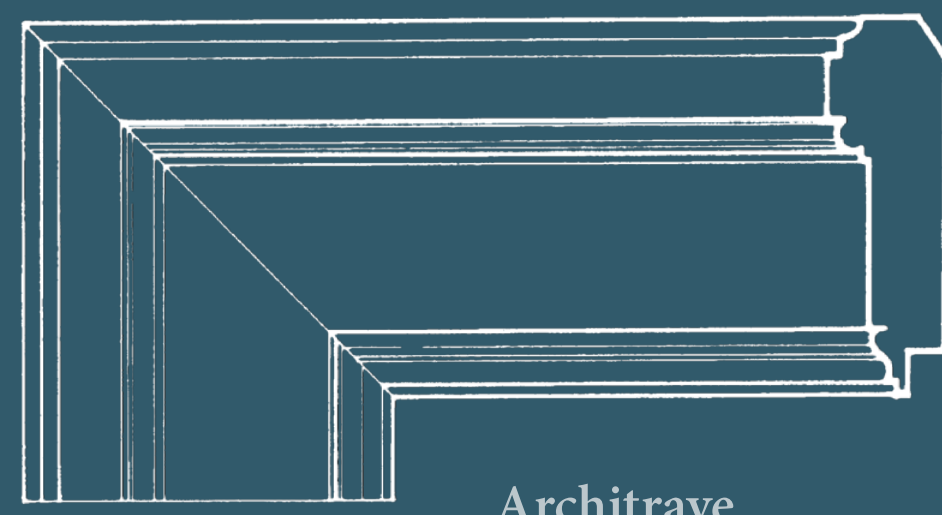
Carved, gessoed, and gilded oak; modern mirror glass

This elaborate double-sweep frame probably once surrounded a half-length portrait. Exuberant sculptural forms, characteristic of the late Rococo style, abound: **acanthus**-fan corners, ornamented shell center decorations, and a top rail crested with a ribbon-tied leaf-and-flower cluster above a **cabochon**. Piercing allows light to play across and through the surfaces, which feature sophisticated contrasts between matte and burnished gilding. This is Jean Chérin's largest, most finely carved, and best-preserved frame.

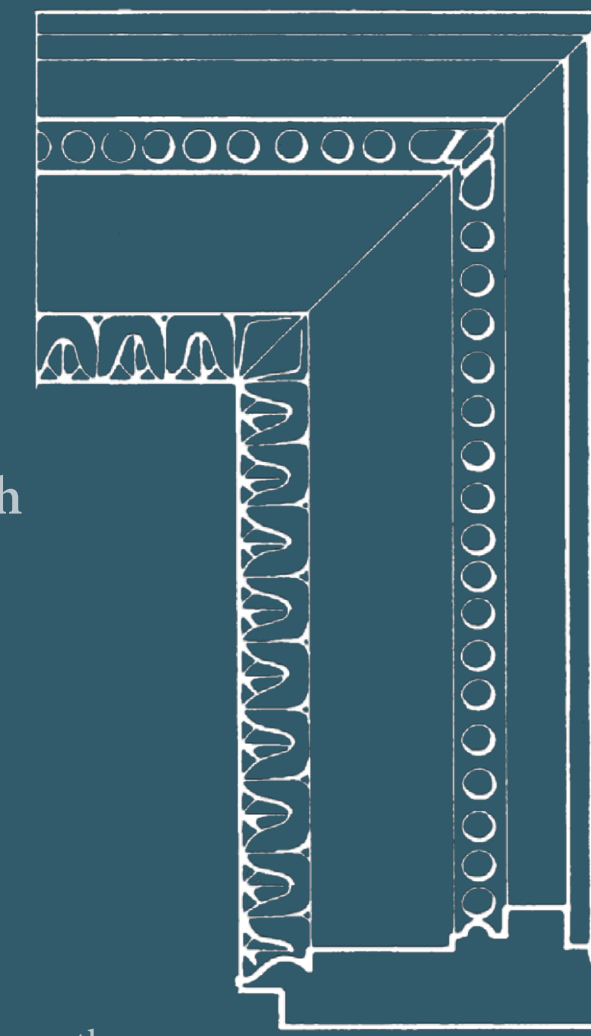
Maker's mark "CHERIN" on the verso of the right rail (enlarged)



PA.428



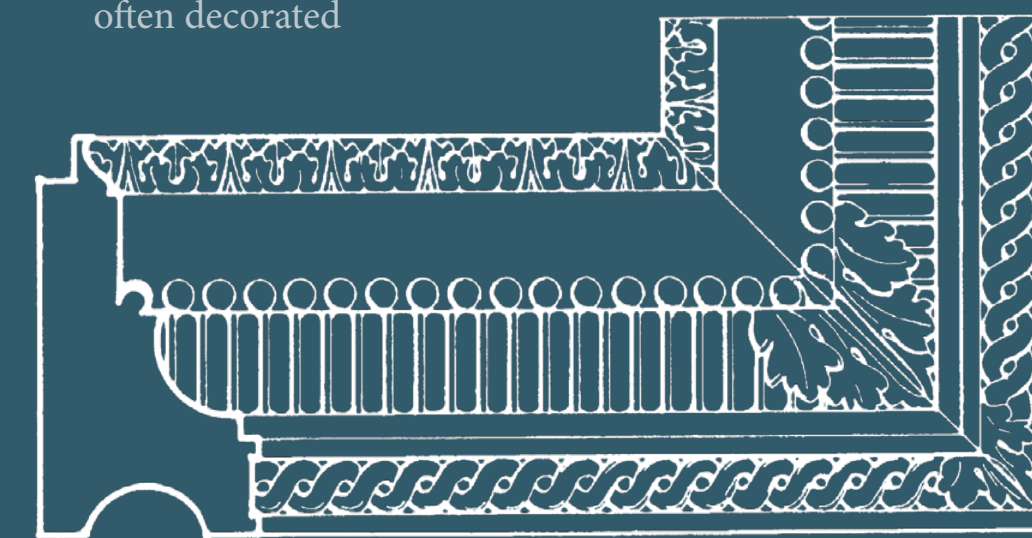
Architrave
Simple, undecorated molding



Architrave with
Ornament



Scotia
Concave molding with a wide
semicircular profile

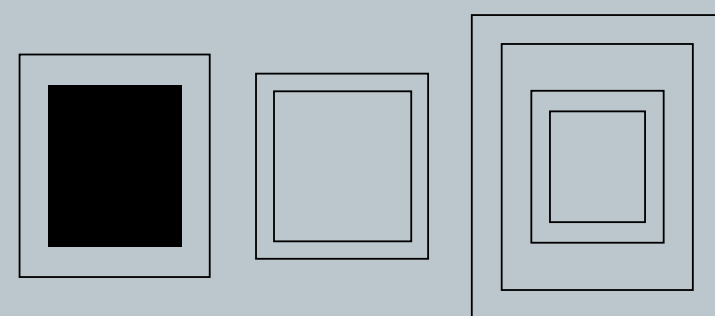


Frieze
Flat central area between the
inner and outer moldings,
often decorated

LOUIS XVI

1774–1792

The playfulness and grace of the Louis XV style abruptly shifted under Louis XVI to simpler and more didactic forms influenced by the contemporary fascination with antiquity and the archaeological discoveries of Pompeii and Herculaneum. The architecture and decoration of the classical past completely altered the shape of frames in France: curving contours disappeared entirely, replaced by controlled, linear forms. A flat undecorated section and a more decorative frame with a scotia and frieze were the two main forms in the late 1700s. Decorations in the corners and on the outer rim were eliminated, but top rails decorated with crests, flowers, and ribbons remained popular for portraits. Fluting on the scotia and acanthus leaves on the corners served to draw the eye toward the central image. In this period of tasteful restraint, subtle contrasts of matte and burnished gilding defined different areas of the frame.



Mars and Venus, an Allegory of Peace

1770

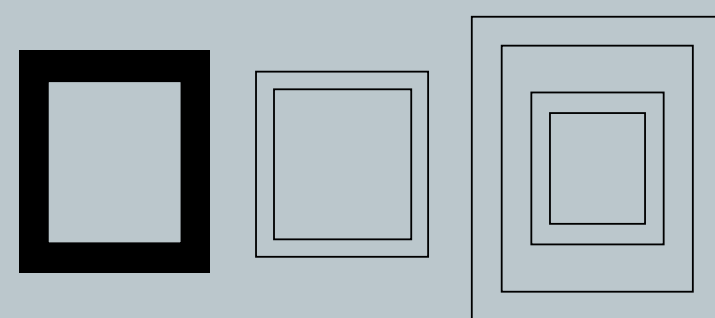
Louis-Jean-François Lagrenée

French, Paris 1725–Paris 1805

Oil on canvas

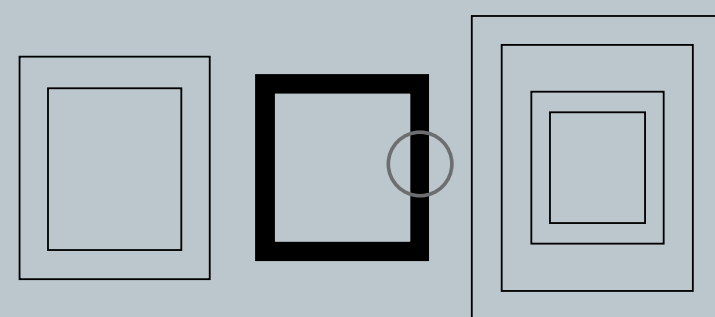
Lagrenée's idealized figures, bright colors, and sculptural contours bring an early classicizing restraint to the Rococo subject of mythic romance. Mars (the Roman god of war), his fierce character tempered by love, pulls back the curtain to gaze upon the sleeping goddess Venus. In the foreground a pair of doves echo the lovers' bliss, building a nest in Mars's abandoned armor. Exhibited in Paris at the Salon of 1771.

97.PA.65



A characteristic example of Louis XVI style, this elegant molding incorporates typical forms of decoration, including a **husk-and-flute** ornament in the flat section and **pearl course** separating the **egg-and-dart** ornament. The frame retains its original gilding.

PA.492



Claude Pépin

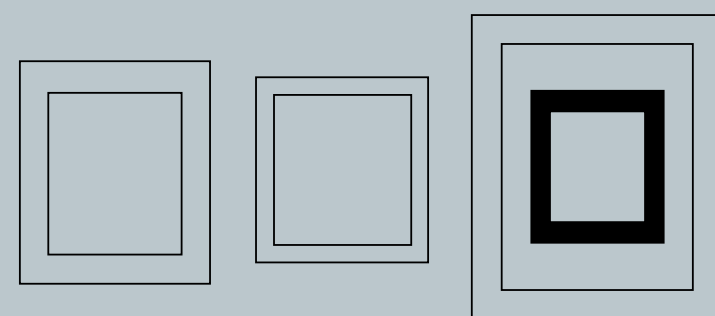
French, active Paris; master carpenter, 1775

This **fluted** hollow frame with **acanthus-leaf** corner ornament closely resembles the molding by Infroit nearby, attesting to the popularity of this versatile style. The carver, Claude Pépin, stamped the back of this piece with his name using a steel punch struck with a hammer, thereby clearly associating the quality of the workmanship with his studio. The frame retains its original size and gilding.

Maker's mark "C. PEPIN" on the verso of the right rail (circled on diagram and enlarged below)



PA.282



Étienne-Louis Infroit

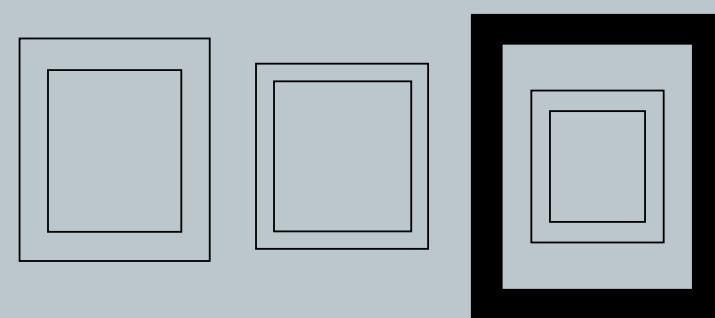
French, Paris 1719/20–Paris 1795; master carver, Académie de Saint Luc, August 14, 1768; master carpenter, October 12, 1768

Infroit stamped his name on the back of this frame, clearly associating its fine quality with his workshop. The form—an elegant **fluted** hollow frame with **acanthus-leaf** corner ornament—resembles the frame made by his contemporary Jean Chérin nearby. It retains its original size and gilding.

Maker's mark "E. L. INFROIT" vertically on the verso of the right rail (enlarged)



PA.57



Jean Chérin

French, Paris 1733/34–Paris 1785; master carver, Académie de Saint Luc, August 14, 1760

or Jean-Marie (Jean II) Chérin

French, Paris, active mid-1770s–after 1806); master carpenter, Académie de Saint Luc, September 1, 1779

About 1770

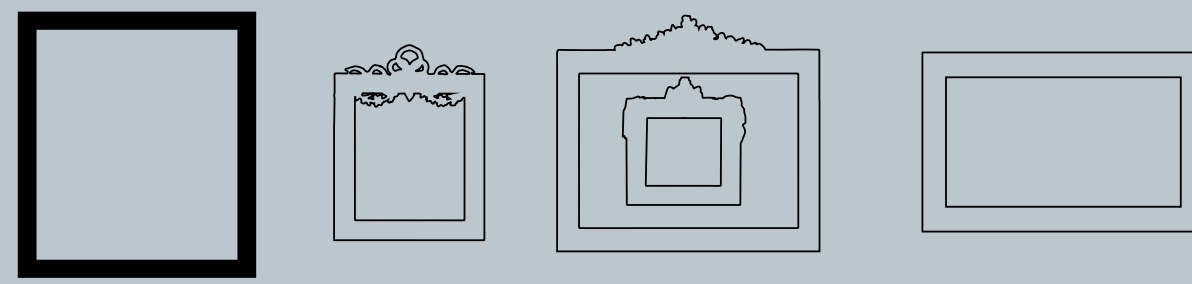
The master carver Jean Chérin dramatically altered his ornate style, exemplified by the large framed mirror in this gallery, during the reign of Louis XVI, when a desire for more austere and architectural styles of decoration prevailed. This scotia frame (molding with a concave profile), which could also have been made by his son, features a **lamb's-tongue** sight edge and **pearl** running pattern. It retains its original size and gilding.

Maker's mark "CHERIN" on the verso of the top rail (enlarged)



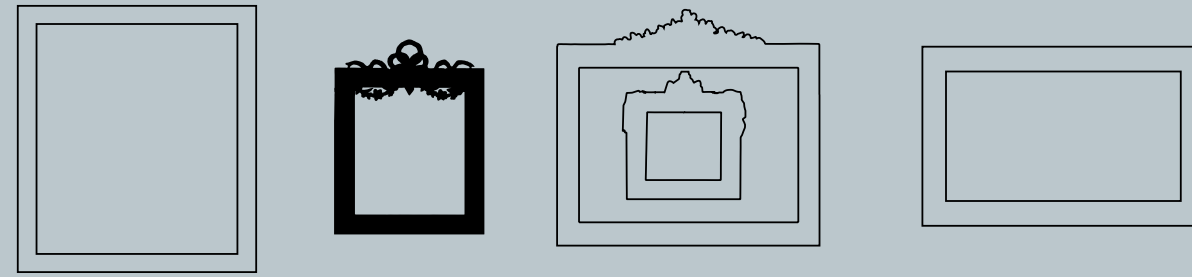
PA.681

TOP ROW



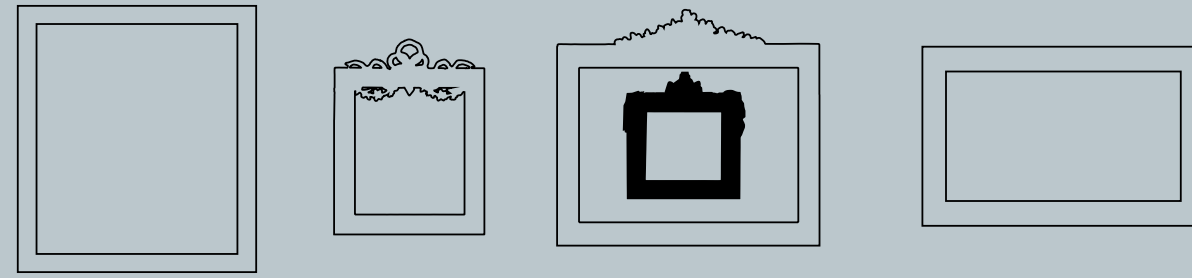
This characteristic architrave frame has a **lamb's-tongue** sight edge and **pearl pattern** with a painted flat. The frame retains its original size and gilding.

PA.139



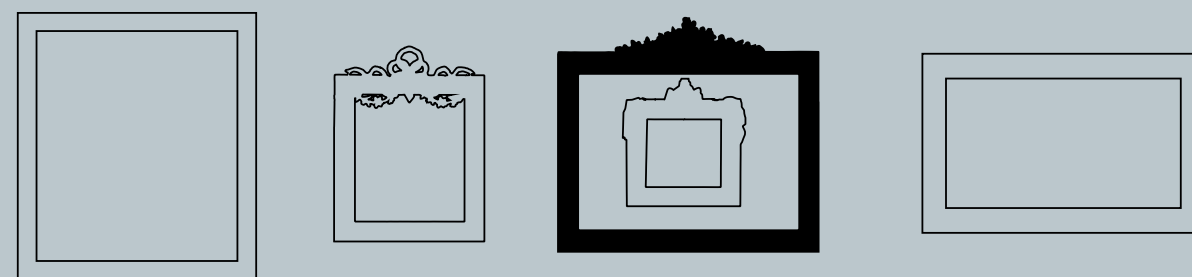
The restrained ornamentation of the lower portions of this architrave frame decorated with a **lamb's-tongue** sight edge and **pearl pattern** is offset by the elaborate gilded cartouche of ribbons and **floral festoons**. The frame retains its original size and gilding.

PA.85



This elegant scotia frame with a **lamb's-tongue** sight edge, **pearl pattern**, and top center cartouche with **floral festoons** would have suited a female portrait. The frame retains its original size and gilding.

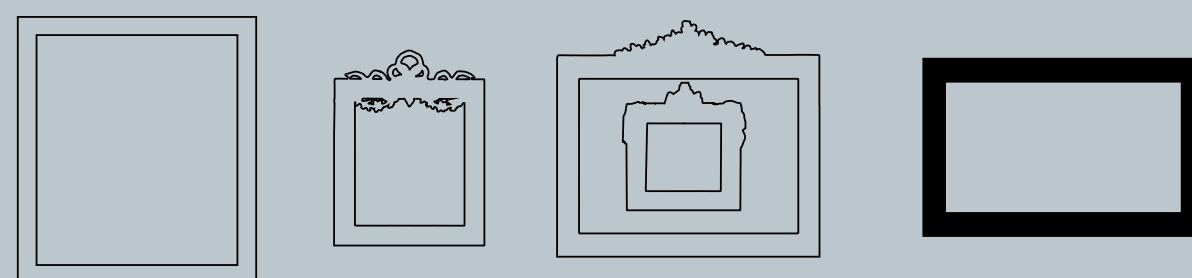
PA.12



Carved and painted oak

This unusual painted example of an architrave frame features two motifs: a running **lamb's-tongue** ornament and large flower-basket cartouche. The frame retains its original surface.

PA.47



This is a characteristic and versatile plain architrave frame, which suits both paintings and prints. The frame retains its original surface.

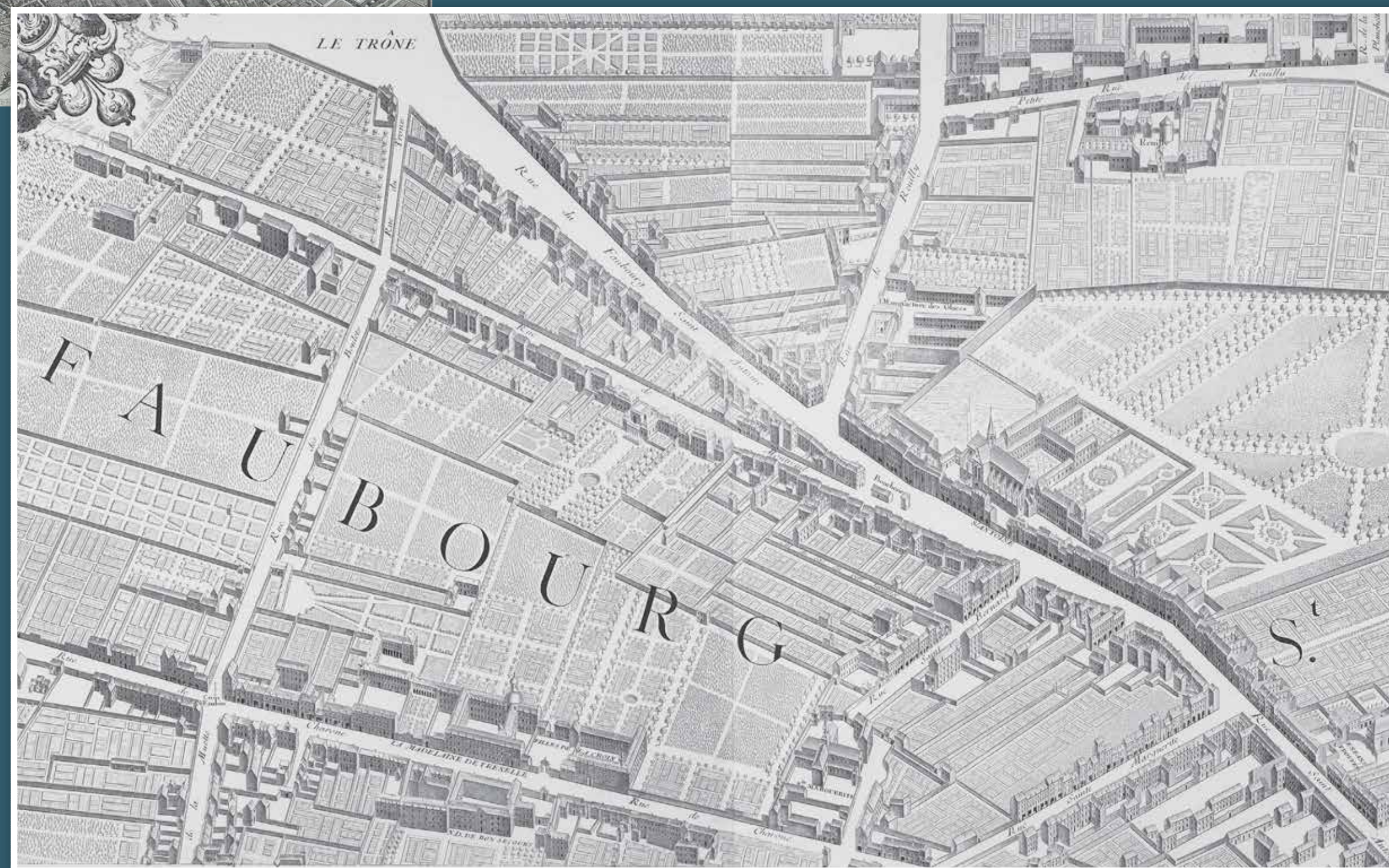
PA.100

MASTERS OF STYLE

The identities of most frame makers in Paris are unknown before about 1750. Most lived and worked in the parish of St. Marguerite near the Faubourg Saint-Antoine (seen here as it appeared 1734–36) in the neighborhood historically occupied by Paris's woodworkers. They would have begun their preparation as a woodworker with nine years of training in the workshop of another master, followed by six years as an apprentice and another three years as a journeyman. A number of designers and wood carvers trained at the Académie de Saint Luc, a school founded in 1705 for painters and sculptors where creativity in design was encouraged. During the Régence period, guild rules strictly defined which craftsmen executed each stage in a frame's production. To mark their work as carpenters and for the benefit of their professional colleagues, twenty-two artists signed their frames by stamping their names on the back.



Plan de Paris, 1734, and detail of Faubourg Saint-Antoine, pl. 1. Michel-Etienne Turgot (French, Paris 1690–Paris 1751). Etching. Via Wikimedia Commons



Several of the leading designers and carvers are represented in this gallery:

Gilles-Marie Oppenord (French, Paris 1672– Paris 1742) was a leading architect and designer whose early training in Italy led to the development of influential motifs and ornamentation defined by sculptural and animated qualities.

Jean Chérin (French, Paris 1733/34–Paris 1785). Master carver, Académie de Saint Luc, August 14, 1760



Étienne-Louis Inffroit (French, Paris 1719/20–Paris 1795). Master carver, Académie de Saint Luc, August 14, 1768; master carpenter, October 12, 1768



Chérin and Inffroit were woodworkers and master carvers (*menuisiers et sculpteurs*)—an unusual dual specialty for the period, which allowed them to build and carve their frames. The only craftsman they employed was a gilder. Chérin and Inffroit enjoyed long careers and worked in both the elaborate Louis XV and more restrained Louis XVI styles.

Claude Pépin, active Paris. Master carpenter, January 22, 1775



This material was published in 2015 to coincide with the J. Paul Getty Museum exhibition “Louis Style: French Frames, 1610-1792” September 15, 2015–January 3, 2016, at the Getty Center.

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