

ANIMALS HUNTING

Roman, Daphne (Antioch), Syria.

late 5th–early 6th century

Mosaic; 9 ft. 6 in. × 9 ft. 3 in. (2.9 × 2.82 m.)

Purchase, 1937 (4672)



Founded in 300 B.C., Antioch by the fourth century A.D. had become—with Rome, Constantinople, and Alexandria—one of the great metropolitan centers of the ancient world. The city was filled with large public buildings, houses, and villas, each with lavish painted wall and ceiling decoration and elaborate pavement designs of mosaic, naturally colored stone cut into cubes (tesserae) and set into designs by artisans working from a cartoon, or pattern guide. Most wall and ceiling paintings were destroyed by catastrophe and time, but the more durable mosaics survive as fine examples of late classical art and design.

The subject matter of the Antioch mosaics ranges from personifications of gods, allegories, and figures from classical mythology and literature to animals, scenes of sea life, still lifes, and purely geometric inventions. The Academy's mosaic is one of the largest panels depicting animals. Excavated at Daphne, once a summer resort outside Antioch, it formed the central panel of a larger floor design in a villa, probably a hunting lodge, which was destroyed in an earthquake in 526.

The composition of the scene is essentially square. A striding lion at the center is surrounded by scenes of ani-

mal combat in which a tigress and her cub pursue a stag and a doe, a lioness chases a pair of ibexes, a leopard attacks an ostrich, and a bull confronts a bear. Birds of various types, including a goose, parrot, quail, guinea fowl, and pheasant, are used as decorative space fillers. This series of vignettes would have been viewed one by one as a person approached from any direction and walked around or over the mosaic. The design also shows a modification of Greek and Roman traditions by Persian and Near Eastern influences in the substitution of a neutral ground for a naturalistic setting. The bits of stone in yellow, tan, red, pink, gray, and black blend in the viewer's eye, compensating for rough outlines.

The careful placement of tesserae to model musculature and the subtle juxtaposition of colors, which shift from dark to light, produce contrast and a tangible sense of contour, giving the animals solidity and vitality. The repetitive bits of stone establish a visual rhythm that emphasizes line and adds to the overall sense of movement. Even the neutral background, in which stones are laid in concentric half-circles, displays an activated surface that further delights the eye. JJ



This paunchy, seated elephant-headed god is a favored cult figure throughout India. Ganesha has been “Hinduized” as the son of Shiva and Parvati. Here he appears as the affable Destroyer of Obstacles and Bestower of Success. He is the indulgent dispenser of health and all bounty, the discriminating patron of cultural and intellectual enterprises, and the earthy “divine commoner,” who is specially venerated by traders and merchants.

The elegantly bejeweled Ganesha is rich in iconography. He wears the sacred thread made of a serpent and carries four attributes, one in each hand: a hatchet, a radish or other bulbous root, a pot of sweetmeats, and his own tusk (legend recounts that he broke off this tusk to hurl it at the moon). Ganesha’s mount, the rat, crouches on the base beneath his feet; two diminutive worshipers adore him on either side. Above his head appears a mask known as *kirttimukha*, which wards off evil and protects the devotee.

HAL

GANESHA

Indian, Rajasthan, Gurjara-Pratihara period,

10th century

Pink sandstone; h. 22 in. (55.9 cm.)

Purchase, 1975 (4310.1)

**PIERRE MIGNARD**

French, 1612–95

The Children of the Duc de Bouillon, 1647Oil on canvas; 35 × 46³/₄ in. (88.9 × 118.7 cm.)

Purchase, Robert Allerton Fund, 1975 (4293.1)

Until the middle of the seventeenth century, Italy was the center of the European art world. Although painting, sculpture, and other art forms flourished in other countries, it was Italy with its glorious heritage of classical antiquity and the Renaissance that most artists aspired to visit. One of many French artists who spent time there, Pierre Mignard worked in Rome from 1635 to 1657 as a highly respected portraitist. His fame rested upon the elaborately detailed likenesses of sitters from the papal court and other important families such as that of the duc de Bouillon.

This richly elaborated and finely finished painting has not always been recognized as an example of the courtly style of portraiture that Mignard practiced with great popularity first in Rome and later in Paris. The lack of a signature and historical documentation sparked much discussion concerning the artistry of the work well before it entered the Academy collection—earlier attributions included artists as diverse as the Dutchman Jan Baptist Weenix and the Italian Francesco Cittadini. A later drawing (Musée des Beaux-Arts d'Orléans) that reproduces the portrait, however, identifies its artist with the inscription "after Mignard" and refers to the subjects as the children of de Bouillon in another annotation. This nobleman, Frédéric-Maurice de la Tour d'Auvergne, was in Italy from

1644 to 1650, a period concurrent with Mignard's lengthy residency there, and apparently commissioned this painting from his compatriot. An inscription on the canvas confirms where it was painted as well as its date: "Roma 1647 Junii Die V" (Rome, June 5, 1647).

The portrait is stylistically consistent with Mignard's other Italian subjects. Working in the cosmopolitan atmosphere of the papal court, he practiced an ostentatious and stately mode preferred at the time. The three young children appear as miniature adults in fashionable and elaborate attire rich in brocades, lace, and jewelry. The twelve-year-old girl appears with the standard attributes of women, fruits and flowers, symbols of fecundity and femininity. However, the protective gesture of one boy as he leans over his dog and the mischievousness of the second establish a mood of intimacy, creating an image of innocence and charm that led to the informality dominant in the portraiture of the following century. JS

**PIETER DE HOOCH**

Dutch, 1629–84

A Musical Conversation, 1674Oil on canvas; 38³/₈ × 45¹/₄ in. (98.1 × 114.9 cm.)

Purchase, 1971 (3798.1)

Until the seventeenth century, the Roman Catholic church and the aristocracy were the major patrons of European art, and their commissions led to the magnificent decoration of both churches and palaces. But, as the Low Countries of Europe merged at this time into the Republic of the United Netherlands—a successful mercantile nation of middle-class burghers—a new class of patrons emerged. Proud of Dutch achievements, they supported the growth of a new pictorial tradition that celebrated their lifestyle: landscapes, still lifes, portraits, and other everyday or genre subjects adorned their comfortable residences. A masterful technician and specialist in genre painting, Pieter de Hooch was influential in the development of domestic subjects.

In this painting two well-dressed young couples meet for an enjoyable musical interlude. One woman with a songbook sits under the affectionate gaze of her gallant; the other readies a cello, while the second man tunes another instrument. They are assembled in a spacious

salon sumptuously decorated with floor tiles, pilasters, and other ornamental wood moldings, as well as with murals, a painting of Venus, and an oriental carpet.

De Hooch established a mood of refinement and tranquility not by subject alone; an acute observer of tenebrous light, he suffused the scene with a glowing radiance that enters from the open side window, illuminates the small gathering, and glints off various details. De Hooch's keen eye for surface appearance was fundamental to his mastery of textures such as the satiny sheen of the women's garments. An appreciation of the compositional value of geometric floor tiles and wall moldings underlies the quiet order of the scene. Peace, harmony, and elegance reign supreme in this depiction of a genteel diversion deemed highly appropriate for portrayals of the leisured class.

Refined musical subjects were popular in seventeenth-century Dutch painting. Valuing such scenes as reflections of their own sophistication, the Dutch also often assigned a variety of metaphorical meanings to genre themes. Concerts generally referred to harmony in family groups and among friends or intimate young couples. In this case, under the watchful eye of Venus, the classical goddess of love, the two couples prepare to commune through music.