Hi, I’m Katherine Brion, a professor of art history at New College of Florida. The recorded discussions that you will hear in this audio guide tour were completed by students in my Spring 2022 “Art and Gender” class. This class takes as its point of departure the understanding of gender as a social construct rather than an innate attribute. In other words, gender is defined as a set of character traits and behaviors that human beings associate with an individual’s perceived biological sex; it is a set of social expectations that individuals are implicitly and explicitly called upon to meet. The class focused on the shifting understanding and impact of gender within art from the 18th Century to the contemporary period, as well as the role of the visual arts in the construction of gender: the way in which the visual arts have shaped, expressed, and/or challenged gender expectations. As part of this examination, the students were asked to select an object from galleries 13 through 21 in the Ringling Museum of Art to closely observe and analyze through the lens of gender, all in the space of a quick audio guide recording. They were also expected to conduct scholarly research into the specific historical contexts of their selected artwork, in order to ensure a more historically aware and accurate interpretation. I’m really proud of what the students have created, and have learned a lot from their work on these objects! I was also inspired by one student’s interest to delve into research on one of the artworks myself, a 17th-century French harpsichord that I have passed by often in the galleries without giving it too much thought. It turned out to be a fascinating subject, at least in my opinion, and a discussion of some of what I learned is included in this tour. I warn you in advance, however, that I didn’t do as good a job as the students in keeping my discussion short and sweet! As you listen to the recordings in this tour, I hope that hearing our various voices and perspectives, as well as the historically distinct ways in which gender manifested itself in the selected artworks, will inspire you to consider gender with a critical eye in these and other objects on view.

As you enter Gallery 21 from the museum’s front lobby, turn to your left to find a painting of a winter battlefield scene titled French Artillery. This will be our first stop.

This painting, known as French Artillery, was painted by Jean Baptiste Edouard Detaille in 1873, in the midst of the Franco-Prussian War. Paris was under siege by the Prussian Army in 1870, in a conflict that left the French humiliated by great defeat and questioning
their own abilities as a military. The art during this time worked to capture the brutality of war. The first person perspective of the French at battle is attributed to Detaille’s respected position as the Army’s semi-official artist. Despite Detaille’s exemption from military service due to his father’s recent death, he served as a civilian attaché and later enlisted in the army. He then fought in the battle that is memorialized by this painting!

In French society of this period, going to war was seen as an entirely masculine activity from which women, understood as the weaker sex, were excluded. Socially, men were expected to be tough, provide protection for their families, and cast their enemies in a weaker, feminine light. Meanwhile, women were responsible for nurturing children and tending to the home, away from the labor of combat. War reinforced the gender binaries that confined men and women into opposing masculine and feminine roles. It is important to keep in mind this separation of the sexes as you look at this artwork: the painting only has soldiers, all of which appear to be men. This brings an extremely masculine scene to the viewers and is representative of military artwork commonly produced at the time.

When you stand back to observe the entire painting, you may notice a wave of deep blue that bounces off of the white piles of snow. The darkness of war is seen just as equally. There’s quite a large number of figures depicted and it feels tight and claustrophobic. I am struck by the contrast of movement in the work. The subjects to the right are very much in motion, while those on the left side are dedicated to stillness.

Now let’s look at the bottom left corner, where there’s a cluster of dead men scattered in the foreground. Dirt and blood stain the snow below them, adding to the feeling of absolute stillness. Directly above them, are men engaged focusing all their attention, and the glowing, yellow charge of a cannon is visible in the forest background. Who’s there hiding in the forest? Is the Prussian Army coming to attack? I can feel the tension cut through the air, as all eyes focus on something beyond the frame of the painting.

As we move towards the right side of the painting, the complete opposite is occurring. The horses are startled, one moment away from trampling each other. I can almost hear the sound of hooves slipping against the frozen ground. This chaotic foreground centers on a prominent individual, firm and heroic on his horse, sword in hand. He presents a model of strength and bravery associated with ideal masculinity. His upright posture and focused expression indicates his confidence during battle, in direct contrast to the struggling horses and men around him. The importance of this heroic military figure is to project the French army’s vigor and masculinity against the Prussians attempts to defeat, and thus feminize, the French.
Unlike the small groups of figures in the foreground, there’s a substantial mass of men marching through the forest, onto their next battle. We can see the rears of the horses and a seemingly endless stream of blue uniforms. Are they aware of the conflict that occupies their fellow men? What’s to come, and where are they going? These men are focused on a multitude of actions that emphasize the importance, as well as the difficulty, of proving their masculinity through the destruction of their enemies.

Facing the same wall, move past the lobby entrance to the painting on the left side of the doors – the Mystery of Life.

The Mystery of Life, by German American artist Carl von Marr, stands out from the other paintings in this section by virtue of its striking contrasts of colors and imagery. In the painting, we see the long, matted hair of an old man sitting on the rocky alcove of a beach at night, weeping over the drowned body of a young woman that has washed ashore, nude and laid out on the sand in the foreground. While the majority of the painting is cast in darkness, what little lighting it does have is focused on her, making her glow against the darker colors of the jagged rocks and roiling ocean. The old, haggard male figure, however, is someone you only really see at second glance. He is obscured in shadow, so that only his dramatic gesture of sorrow is visible. It’s a painting of contrasts, whether of age, gender, or life and death: the brightness and the vitality of the woman in the sand versus the darkness permeating the rest of the scene and enshrouding the worn old man. What led the artist to make these creative decisions?

One of the driving forces was Marr’s desire to make the most of the dramatic, anti-Semitic myth of the Wandering Jew. The story goes that he was cursed with eternal life for having mocked Christ prior to his crucifixion. The legend quickly grew in popularity and became an excuse for the persecution of the Jewish people. One could argue Marr has reinforced the anti-Semitic implications of this tale through a color contrast often used in religious paintings- white symbolizing purity and darker colors representing sin – thereby suggesting a fairly simple conclusion to our previous question: the Wanderer is darker because Marr is showing him as undeserving of God’s mercy. However, I feel the scene is more complex than that, and I believe it ties into why, despite there being plenty of other depictions of the myth to choose from, this painting is one of the representations of the Wandering Jew that continues to hold our interest. For one, if the painting’s depiction of this figure were entirely negative, why would he appear to be mourning, which seems tailor-made to evoke sympathy rather than condemnation? And furthermore, what is the significance of the woman? Why is she laid out for us like that?

To me, the woman is a means of heightening the drama and sorrow of the Wanderer’s curse of Immortality. Eternity is an awfully long time to be left alone with no place to call
home. From the frazzled gray hair and wiry frame of his shoulders and arms, we can assume that he is well on in years and has been wandering for quite some time and has started to grasp the true extent of the horror of his curse. Enter the young woman: dead and washed ashore, taken out of her prime too early. She is everything the Wanderer is not and everything he cannot have. In contrast to the forsaken Wanderer, light shines on her, suggesting that she has reached a divine peace. Older and wiser, the Wanderer seems to recognize and mourn the tragedy in both his life and the life cut short in front of him.

That leaves one last question: why is the woman laid out the way she is? Well, the answer to that seems obvious to me: she is an object, not a fully-realized subject. A subject would be given agency or at least dignity, instead of being used as a naked, vulnerable body on display merely to heighten the tragedy. Though the Wanderer is also an exploited figure, he is lent greater subjectivity: his grief is given the privacy and dramatic flair of being engulfed in darkness. We see him curled in on himself, his sorrow, loneliness, and misery etched into his face and expressions. As a result, he is given more humanity, while the woman is only a symbol representing everything the man isn’t—a contrast that is fostered by their gender difference. The woman exists as a thing, not an actual person, and as such was made to be looked at, supporting what really makes the painting special: its contrasts. However, this is just one perspective. How do you respond to these two figures?

Our next work is Ploughing in the Nivernais, a large painting of oxen in a field on the gallery’s west wall.

Hello, I am Amelia and today we will be discussing the painting, Plowing in the Nivernais, by Rosa Bonheur. Look to the white cow in the center of the painting. It’s positioned toward the viewer, with a calm face and large shining eyes. The cow to its side has a similarly detailed face. Their coats are made up of expressive, textured strokes, mimicking hair. They walk upon soft, rich soil, and towards the lower right of the painting, even pass a delicate wildflower. Plowing in the Nivernais was considered a masterpiece, even at the time of its creation, winning first place at the Salon in Paris. Bonheur thrives on detail in this work, but there is one part that breaks the mold. The farmers leading the plow are soft figures, lacking detail in all aspects, but most noticeably in the face, allowing the focus to lie predominately on the cows. This decision reflects Bonheur’s own interactions, or lack thereof, with people.

Born in 1822, Bonheur discovered an early love for painting animals, one that stuck with her throughout her life. She had a disdain for the city life of Paris and never truly integrated into the art circles of the time. Bonheur preferred the countryside and the
company of animals. Only her family, and her lifelong companion, Nathalie Micas, were truly close with her. Her father, a firm believer in many ideas considered revolutionary at the time, was a supporter of equality of the sexes, something he ingrained in the way he raised his children. This instilled in Bonheur a sense of independence that remained throughout her life and led to her becoming one of the few well-known women artists of the time. Even among other women artists, Bonheur was an outlier. She transgressed gender roles, dressing in masculine fashions and men’s clothes, kept her hair short, and refused marriage. When studying at the Louvre, Bonheur distanced herself from the major art circles and movements of the time. Her self-inflicted solitude combined with her determination led her to investigate aspects of art not usually encouraged for women of the time. She made regular trips to the butchers, dissected animals, and even got police permission to wear pants and attend cattle shows. This independent spirit and devotion to animals is translated wonderfully into Bonheur’s realistic style and breathes life into her animals. In giving these animals the focus, Bonheur’s preference shines through, in the delicate strokes and highlights of the cows’ coats, and their large captivating eyes, open and enthralling to the viewer allowing you to see through her eyes.

The final stop in this gallery is a large painting of a group of people, to the left of the huge painting of the emperor in the center of the gallery. This painting is titled A Portrait Group of Parisian Celebrities.

A Portrait Group of Parisian Celebrities is but one fragment of a much larger panoramic painting, the Panorama of the History of the Century, created for the International Exhibition held in Paris in 1889. The original measured at 120 meters long and 6 meters high, and, due to its massive size, did not find a new display location once the Exhibition was over. Instead, it was divided up into fragments and sold separately. Due to its massive size, Alfred Stevens completed the painting with the help of painter Henri Gervex and fifteen assistants.

Panoramas as public spectacles became especially popular in the 1880s in Paris, during what has been referred to as a panorama revival. Often life-sized and covering a long, monumental surface, panoramas distinguished themselves from other art displays by surrounding the viewer, making them feel part of the represented setting. This panorama specifically appealed to Third Republic French ideals about patriotism and education by displaying one hundred years’ worth of French history. It depicted an astounding six hundred and fifty culturally significant public figures from the nineteenth century, including the group of celebrities featured in this fragment. Though this fragment depicts several dramatists, writers, and composers, my eye is immediately drawn to the woman
in the foreground, actress Sarah Bernhardt, portrayed in her role as the queen in a well-known play by Victor Hugo.

As one of the earliest modern celebrities, Bernhardt’s hyper-feminine garb in this painting separates her even more amongst the mostly male celebrities surrounding her with whom she converses. Her outfit starkly contrasts the uniform outfitting each of the men—white shirts layered underneath black suits complete with neck-ties and pale gloves. This attire came to represent the distinctly masculine bourgeois values of decency, effort, sobriety, and self control, which contradict Bernhardt’s white, regal costume. Bernhardt’s gown is outfitted with a frilled collar, puffed sleeves, and a train which adds some height to the actress, while accessories like her crown add to the flamboyant decadence of her costume. The outfit in which Stevens chose to portray Bernhardt contrasts the masculine uniform in every way, perhaps pointing to the other ways in which Bernhardt challenged gender norms.

Between her wide acclaim as an actress and her behaviors on and off the stage, many men criticized Bernhardt for her gender deviance—a reputation that did in part stem from widespread documentation of her affairs with women. In other ways, it was her “boundless energy and heroic will to achieve” that contrasted her feminine features, proving to some she constituted a third gender. Bernhardt’s Jewish identity no doubt came into play in regards to public perception of her gender. Jewish women like Bernhardt were depicted in nineteenth century art as simultaneously masculine and also as hypersexual seductresses. Bernhardt specifically bore the brunt of antisemitic satirical attacks, portraying her as vain and obsessed with money and sex, or, drawing on a anti-Semitic trope, exaggerating her nose. I love how Stevens instead celebrates Bernhardt as a queen, emphasizing her poised profile and elegant and regal bearing. Bernhardt’s critics may have portrayed her as vain, masculine, or even sickly because of her queer and Jewish identities, but I find it refreshing that Stevens chose to immortalize Bernhardt as a queen amongst other famous figures. Despite criticisms of her gender deviance, she stands tall and proud, even outside of her acting role, reinforcing the cultural significance of Bernhardt’s celebrity.

Now we’ll leave Gallery 21. Pass through the subsequent three large rooms into a smaller gallery with mauve colored walls, which is Gallery 17. As you enter this room, find the painting across from the exterior doors titled Sappho Inspired by Love.

Hello! This is Elizabeth.

On the south wall in Gallery 17 you’ll find Sappho Inspired by Love. This portrait of Sappho, one of my personal favorites at the Ringling Museum, is by the Swiss
Neoclassical painter, Angelica Kauffman. The painting’s frame is believed to be the original, which is quite rare. Imagine Kauffman herself --- or more likely, one of her assistants, which included her father and her husband --- preparing it for display exactly as you see it today.

This oil on canvas is one of seven works by Kauffman included in the 1775 exhibition of the Royal Academy. The Royal Academy of Arts was founded in 1768 in London to cultivate and improve the arts of painting, sculpture, and architecture. These skills were believed, at that time, to be only within the capabilities of men. It is a testament to Kauffman’s mastery of her craft that she was accepted as one of just two females among the 34 founding members of the Academy, along with the English artist Mary Moser.

This image portrays Sappho luxuriously draped in the dress of her home, the Greek island of Lesbos – her rich blue cloak lays bright against her pristine white gown. Her skin seems to glow in the sunlight. Cupid’s red cape and quiver are eye-catching, but Sappho is the clear focus of the image. The famed poet is penning an ode to Aphrodite. An ode is much like a love letter but grander and on a poetic scale. Behind her, Cupid appears to be offering his advice.

Purchased by John Ringling in 1928 as a painting titled Lady as Venus with Cupid by her Side, it was only after the writing on the scroll was recognized as Sappho’s celebrated poem “Ode to Aphrodite,” that it was retitled as Sappho Inspired by Love.

Like Sappho, Kauffman succeeded in a profession requiring a level of skill believed to be exclusively and divinely granted to men, and in a genre believed to be impossible for a woman to succeed in. History paintings were large-scale depictions of historically important, religious, mythological, or allegorical subjects. It was more common for female painters to produce smaller still life or landscape paintings, in part because those subjects were considered more acceptable for women, but also because women were not allowed to participate in the full course of artistic study. The latter included the study of nude human bodies, which was believed to be critical to creating a history painting with accuracy. Denied the opportunity to pursue history painting in the context of her membership in the Academy, Kauffman did it anyway. She funded her history paintings, like Sappho Inspired by Love, with her earnings from her successful career.

**The other painting we’ll discuss in this room is Dream of Joseph, and it’s hanging to the right of the doorway.**

Hello, my name is Alice! I’m a student at New College, and I’m going to talk to you about the painting you see in front of you now, Dream of Joseph by Anton Raphel Mengs.
Mengs was a German artist who was trained in classical painting in Italy. He later moved to Britain, where he became a popular portrait painter for the upper class. In addition to portraiture, Mengs would often paint biblical scenes like the one seen here. This painting depicts an episode from the Christian Bible in which Joseph was warned by an angel to take Mary and the baby Jesus and flee Bethlehem in order to escape King Herod’s efforts to ward off foretold threats to his power, including through the massacre of newborns.

The contrast between Joseph and the Angel is extremely noticeable, especially in terms of their gender representation. Mengs has highlighted Joseph’s mature masculinity while the Angel—in keeping with Biblical tradition—is an androgynous figure, even leaning towards a feminine presentation more similar to the female figures present in other paintings in this room, whether Sappho or Agrippina. This contrast is reminiscent of an artistic decision that was popular before Mengs time as a painter. This was to depict a ruggedly masculine figure, usually an older man in a position of authority, with a younger, more ephebic (i.e. adolescent or feminine) man. This was often used in depictions of mythological or biblical stories. While the trend was not as popular during the time that Mengs was painting, the influence is still felt in this painting.

In this painting Joseph is depicted with a rugged masculinity. He is incredibly muscular, reminiscent of ancient Greco-Roman sculptures of mature heroes, and his furrowed brow and wrinkled face recalls the unidealized approach of certain Roman portraits seeking to emphasize the sitter’s sincerity and service to the nation. Furthermore, Joseph’s carpentry tools can be seen at his side, reminding the viewer of the hard labor that he does in order to provide for and serve Mary and Jesus. This emphasis on Joseph’s labor and his careworn face was in keeping with the masculine ideal to which adult men were held at this time.

The angel at Joseph’s side, however, provides a stark contrast to this rugged masculine look. The angel is incredibly androgynous, as they possess no features that are distinctly masculine or feminine. They wear soft pastel colors, in sharp contrast to Joseph’s dark gray and gold. Though pastels were not as strongly aligned with the feminine as they are today, the softer, rounded contours of the angel’s physical form is closer to that of the female figures visible in this room. They lack the defined musculature that Joseph possesses and their face is smooth and unwrinkled, in contrast to Joseph’s intense expression.

For me, this contrast in gender presentation from Joseph to the Angel emphasizes Joseph’s humanity. Unlike the Angel, who is bathed in holy light and unmarked by any signs of difficult labor, Joseph is cast in shadow, and his expression is concerned with the burden of saving his family. He is the opposite of the androgynous and ethereal
Angel, who transcends the material realm and its gender norms. Joseph is simply a man shouldering a father’s responsibilities, even if they are greater than most!

**Now move into Gallery 16 – in the far right corner, you’ll see a full-length portrait of a woman in a silk dress – that will be our next stop.**

Towering above you in crisp shiny satin, she stares unflinchingly, yet with repose and grace. This is a portrait of Mary Lilias Scott, an elite Scottish woman well known for her beauty and talented singing voice. It was painted by Allan Ramsay in 1748 with drapery done by Joseph Van Aken. This portrait was made during a time when British portraiture was remarkably standardized and almost factory-like in its production. Like many other artists of his time, Ramsay would paint only the sitter’s head and hands, then hand it off to Van Aken to complete the other elements, allowing Ramsay to complete more portraits in a shorter period of time. If you look closely at her dress you can see how the brush strokes are broader and less blended than in her hand or face, which are both comparatively much smoother.

When looking at this painting, you might notice that her dress has ornate white lace around the collar and sleeves; however, these elements are not actually consistent with 18th-century fashion trends, but instead come from the 17th century. Around the early to mid 18th century, a large number of British portraits depict their sitters in what is known as the Vandyke dress - so called because it takes inspiration from the fashion of the 17th century that Anthony Van Dyke, another famous portrait painter, often painted. Mary Lilias Scott is depicted not only with Vandyke-inspired lacework but also with full sleeves, pearl jewelry, and ribbon accents - all of which are elements of the Vandyke dress. 18th-century interest in 17th-century fashion corresponded with masquerade balls which were reportedly full of people in Vandyke dresses. These balls were frequently themed around glamorized pastoral life, and so worked well with the simpler satins and stylings of the Vandyke dress.

Although Mary Lilias Scott was well known for her beauty, she apparently never married, despite the fact that marriage would have been expected of a woman of her status and beauty. She was clearly engaged in elite society - attending masquerade parties and sitting for portraits - so her decision not to marry is curious, especially considering there was no shortage of suitors. The painter himself was one of them, as was the Duke of Hamilton, who commissioned this portrait. We might never know why she didn’t marry, though, because little information can be found on her in comparison to the painter, Allan Ramsay, whose life and career are well documented. But despite how little we know about her, we can still use this portrait as a tool to glimpse into the past, into her life. If you are standing directly in front of the painting, perhaps only a couple of feet away, I
encourage you to take a few steps back so you can see her all at once. What do you see now that you might not have noticed before? Perhaps her eyes that initially looked past you now meet your gaze. What do you think she’s trying to tell you?

**We’ll head now into Gallery 15 – the bright pink gallery right next door. As you enter Gallery 15, turn immediately to your right to find a portrait of a woman surrounded by two winged babies.**

Hi! My name is Jordan, and I am going to talk to you about this 1731 oil painting by Noël-Nicolas Coypel, which is an allegorical portrait of Louise Élisabeth, the French princess of Conti, as Venus.

Upon first glance, I believed that this portrait was just another depiction of a hyper feminine and idealized woman, held to impossible standards that could only be met in the guise of Venus. However, I have since discovered that this portrait can be seen as a source of self-fashioning and agency for the Princess of Conti.

It was common practice among French aristocratic society to commission allegorical portraits – or portraits in which the sitter represented themselves through another subject, such as a Greco-Roman god or goddess. Allegorical portraits were not exclusive to women. If you look at the painting to the left of this painting of the Princess of Conti, you will see the portrait of a young man depicted as Bacchus, the Roman god of agriculture, wine, and fertility. In Coypel’s portrait of Louise Élisabeth, the princess wished to be presented in the image of the Roman goddess, Venus (equivalent to the Ancient Greek goddess, Aphrodite). Venus is the goddess of love, beauty, and desire, enhanced in this painting by the presence of two winged gods of love: Eros (commonly known as Cupid) and Anteros. Eros and Anteros frame the princess with both a floral garland and their bodies – their attention highlighting the luminescent skin of her exposed neck and shoulders, the alert turn of her head and gaze, and her rosy lips and cheeks, features no doubt enhanced to be worthy of the goddess of Love.

Outside of these portraits, women often had limited power during this time. Many women were restricted to domestic and court duties while men, notably fathers and husbands, were empowered to make the important decisions. A husband was sought for Louise Élisabeth in 1713, resulting in an unhappy 14-year marriage to Louis Armand of Bourbon. Her husband was reportedly ill-tempered and prone to violence, which may have inspired the princess’s many affairs. After her husband’s death in 1727, the princess spent much of her time in the social life and drama of the French court.
Despite the important role she played at court, Louise Élisabeth, like most women in early 18th-century France, would have been prevented by her gender from playing a direct role in affairs of the state. Therefore, her self-representation in courtly spaces was one of the few areas in which she held influence and agency. By shaping her own identity through visual representation, the Princess of Conti was able to create art, in her own right. After all, this portrait, although painted by Coypel, is the result of commission, collaboration, and approval by the princess herself.

Participants in 18th century court culture were engrossed with the art of appearing, whether through cosmetics, fashion, or portrait paintings such as this. Portraits often served to reinforce the image that the sitter hoped to impress upon society, and preserved it for future generations. An identity could be created through appearance, similar to many profiles on social media today. As a result, the Princess of Conti was not only creating an idealized image of herself, but also claiming an identity with her depiction as Venus. So, what was her identity?

Well, this portrait exudes femininity – seen in the pastel color palette, billowing silk fabrics, and floral accents filling the canvas. In the face of cultural devaluation of femininity in the 18th century, such an extravagant display suggests something of a power move, to me. I see in this portrait, ownership of one’s image as a woman, and of the love and desire that she inspires. What do you see in it?

Turn your attention to the large instrument in the center of this room – we’ll discuss this harpsichord next.

Hi, I’m Katherine Brion, a professor of art history at New College of Florida. When I look at this 17th-century harpsichord, my attention is immediately drawn to the landscape painted on its lid. It’s the brightest, most vivid part of the instrument’s decoration, and the only area that presents the illusion of a window into a three-dimensional space, distinct from the grisaille medallions, allegorical figures, mythological creatures, and botanical motifs, set against a flat gold ground, that cover the rest of the instrument.

The landscape, which became visible when the lid was raised to play the harpsichord, is arranged to echo the triangular surface it decorates. Two small, brightly lit figures—a golden-haired man running after a woman—stand out against its dark, earthen tones. The man’s outstretched legs and flowing blue garment suggest the speed of the chase. The woman’s streaming hair and bent leg similarly indicate forward motion, but her movement has been interrupted: her hands have sprouted into leafy branches, and her feet are taking root in the soil. The woman’s transformation would have made this scene immediately recognizable to 17th-century audiences as the climactic end to the
mythological tale of Daphne and Apollo, in which the nymph Daphne begged her father, a river god, to turn her into a tree. If you look closer, you can just make out the pale, ghostly figure of Daphne’s father on the riverbank to the right of his daughter. Daphne was fleeing the unrelenting pursuit of the god Apollo, who had been struck by Cupid with unrequited love as a punishment for arrogance. Classical mythology, history, and art is full of stories of rape, in which mortal or immortal men (and sometimes women) seized objects of desire against their will. Daphne’s successful escape from Apollo’s grasp is an exception, though it came at a steep cost. The frustrated Apollo, in contrast, took branches and leaves from Daphne’s new form, the laurel tree, to create a new symbol of victory.

Harpsichords were an important source of music at the French royal court and in the social gatherings held at the homes of the aristocracy or wealthy members of the bourgeoisie, who prized richly decorated instruments like this one as a sign of their status. What might these 17th-century patrons and audiences have made of the scene visible on its lid? Certainly the implicit violence of Daphne’s desperate escape speaks to the status of women in this period, in which increasingly restrictive laws made them subservient to their fathers or husbands, considered more like property than autonomous subjects.

The depiction of Apollo also evoked the young French king, Louis XIV. On the harpsichord, the small golden rays encircling Apollo’s head point to his status as the sun god, the source of Louis’s image as the sun king. Apollo was seen as an appropriate model for 17th-century rulers due to his association with the life-giving power of the sun and the order and harmony of the arts, as well as his ruthlessness in dealing with his enemies. Though Louis would not make the sun his official emblem until 1661, he was associated with Apollo long before. In fact, shortly after this harpsichord’s creation, the king appeared in the role of the Sun God in a lengthy, elaborate court ballet intended to confirm the monarchy’s power and magnificence after a period of civil war and rebellion. Would this painting have been seen as subversively emphasizing Apollo’s failure (and thus the king’s) or his transformation of that failure into triumph? It’s impossible to know for sure, but it was most likely intended to convey not only the victory of Cupid and Apollo but also of art, given that the myth of Daphne and Apollo was often seen as an allegory of the transformative power of art. In this light, Daphne’s loss again appears as others’ gain.

However, the study of this harpsichord opens up another perspective on gender dynamics in this period. Its maker, Claude Jacquet, was part of a musical family that produced Élisabeth Jacquet de la Guerre. Considered a musical prodigy in her own time,
she was praised for her singing, performance on the harpsichord and organ, and skills in improvisation. Thanks to Louis XIV’s patronage, she was able to cultivate her talents at the French court. This was not entirely unusual, for many women contributed to the intense musical activity that occurred there. Jacquet de la Guerre was exceptional, however, in that she also became a composer, and was considered the equal of her male peers in this role. As far as we know, she was the first woman to compose music for the harpsichord. You can hear one of her compositions, published with a dedication to the king when she was in her early twenties, playing in the background of my discussion. She also worked in a number of other musical genres, and was the first woman to have an opera performed at the prestigious Royal Academy of Music.

Jacquet de la Guerre’s success contrasts with the fate of Daphne. Louis XIV’s recognition of her extraordinary talent, rather than forcing her to live out her days as an ornament to his own glory, enabled her to achieve unprecedented professional success and live an independent, fulfilling life. Shortly after Louis XIV’s court took up permanent residence at Versailles in 1682, Jacquet de la Guerre married and left to live in Paris. Unlike most women in this period, she continued her professional activities after her marriage. In addition to composing and publishing, she performed regularly at concerts in her own home and elsewhere in the city, at a time when Paris was displacing the court as the center of French musical innovation.

Many limitations were placed on women in this period, as suggested by the choice to foreground Daphne’s cruel fate on this harpsichord, yet this remarkable woman was able to overcome so many of them. I like to think that she may have played or that her music may have been played on this very instrument. Can you imagine her seated there, her fingers moving nimbly over its now-absent keys?

Music Credits:
“Harpsichord Suite No. 3 in A Minor: V. Sarabande”
By: Élisabeth Jacquet de La Guerre
Performed by: Francesca Lanfranco
Courtesy of Naxos of America, Inc.

Make your way to the adjoining gallery, Gallery 14. Turn to the right to find a pair of portraits of a man and a woman facing each other.

Hi, my name is River and I hope you’re enjoying your time at the Ringling. If you’re listening to this, then you’re probably interested in the unnamed individuals before you. Portrait of a Lady by Dutch artist Isaack Luttichuijs is one of two paintings in a set of
wedding portraits. You can see the accompanying portrait titled Portrait of a Man directly to the left.

John Ringling himself acquired *Portrait of a Man* several decades before the museum would acquire the female pendant in 1981. While the sitters’ identities are unknown to us, the museum staff of the 1980s knew just from looking at the woman’s portrait that she must have been a pendant to the portrait that they already had in the Ringling collection.

Look closely at the two paintings - how can you tell they’re meant to go together? For one thing, their backgrounds align into one cohesive skyline. The matching rings on their little fingers further solidify our belief that these two are a pair; pinky rings were a sign of a committed relationship during this time and are a detail Luttichuijs liked to include in many of his works.

The contrasting colors between the two portraits reinforces the overall feminine and masculine constructs created in this composition. The man wears clothes of a darker saturation, mostly red in color, possibly highlighting his passion in the hunt for love, which is also alluded to by the spear he holds in his right hand.

The lady’s portrait is composed with much lighter values as you can see in her white silk, which is complemented by her blue sash. The combination of white with a touch of blue, may allude to the concept of purity. I can’t help but wonder if Luttichuijs was inspired by the clothing of the Virgin Mary, who was notoriously shown in a combination of blue and white. The concept of purity is further suggested by the rose she holds out as an offering to her lover; his prize for his efforts in the hunt for love.

While historically, the man’s role in these portraits may have taken greater a precedence, as it would showcase their power and wealth, I personally find myself drawn towards the Portrait of a Lady. Maybe it’s her kind eyes and the way that they seem to match the gallery wall color? Or maybe it’s the way that light seems to reflect off the fabric of her dress and its adorning pearls? Her attire is quite intricate, and I keep finding myself getting lost in the details of her dress.

It is thought that the sitters of these portraits were of aristocratic status as their attire is richer in color and lighter in hue than the attire of an average citizen. There is an additional painting by Luttichuijs, also titled “Portrait of a Lady” in which he utilized the exact same attire as the Portrait of a Lady that you see before you for a different patron, making me think that this outfit would have been highly desirable in its time!

*Our next painting is rather difficult to see – look at the wall covered with paintings and find the scene of the Last Judgement near the top.*
Hello, my name is Damien, and I will be talking about the painting ‘Last Judgment.’ Located in gallery fourteen, you can find this particular painting at the top and center of a dense cluster of paintings hung on one wall. It is a Renaissance painting attributed to an unknown artist, possibly associated with the School of Fontainebleau, named for a French chateau where a large number of both French and Italian painters worked to produce art for the French court.

The Renaissance was a period that produced many iconic works of art, many of them focused on religious subjects like this depiction of the Last Judgment. The French, who were largely Catholic, would have understood the Last Judgment as Jesus Christ’s foretold return to Earth to pronounce final judgment on humankind. The painting depicts this event as described in the bible: Jesus Christ himself descends from the clouds with his followers, and the angels herald his arrival with trumpets. On Earth, those who await judgment are depicted nude, in the foreground; beyond them, clothed figures are sent to either heaven, at Jesus Christ’s right hand, or hell, at his left.

Depictions of the Last Judgment often raise very crucial Christian beliefs about nakedness and sin. In the creation stories of the bible, Adam and Eve existed in God’s garden of Eden, defined by their innocence and unembarrassed by their nakedness. When they are both tempted by a serpent to partake in the forbidden fruit of knowledge of good and evil, they become aware of concepts like shame. It is from this original sin that the Fall of Man begins within the Bible, and one of the first signs of said fall is the shame of nakedness. Some of the biblical texts on the Last Judgment similarly compared nakedness unfavorably to clothing.

It is this concept of shame, specifically shame of the human body, that I want to examine within Last Judgment. In the painting, all the sinners waiting to be judged are completely nude. Given the focus of art and gender in my current art history class, I was intrigued by the fact that these figures are naked whether they are a man or a woman. Meanwhile, excluding Jesus himself, who is half nude, all of the figures surrounding Christ are fully clothed. As far as I can tell from my research, the nakedness of the figures in the foreground was meant to convey that their sins are bared for all to see. It is through this that everyone is judged, no matter their gender or social status. Similarly, to either side of Jesus Christ both a woman, the Virgin Mary, and a man, St. John the Baptist, plead for mercy for the sinners. I would like to think that this balance and the gender equality before judgment suggests that, contrary to some popular beliefs, Eve did not simply beguile Adam into taking a bite from the forbidden fruit. They were both equally responsible for the fall of man according to the bible, and those who came after them are, at least within this artwork, judged equally for their sins.
Our program concludes in the adjoining gallery with deep orange walls – Gallery 13. Find the biggest painting in this space, titled Still Life with Dead Game.

Today I’m going to consider the role of gender and sexuality in 17th century Flanders, and how those concepts are present - or not - in this work of art.

The way Snyder’s still life is presented makes the animals feel they were used more like trophies rather than food. Bodies are stacked precariously on top of one another, several layers deep, in a way that would have led them to rot quickly. There are so many that they start to spill off the table and onto the floor. Animals like herons and peacocks are included in the pile, which weren’t eaten commonly since medieval times. Animals from the land, sky, and sea show domination over every domain of the earth.

The use of red keeps your eye moving around the work, drawing us, from the fruit underneath the meat, to the rabbit’s bloodshot eye, the lobster that’s starting to look increasingly similar to the boar’s sliced belly, and the bloodstains on the cloth beneath it. As you look, you may also notice the beady eyes coming from beneath the table, indicative of a lurking pet looking out at the scene with a scared expression perhaps as if thinking if it’s next.

This still life includes a lot of game, i.e. animals killed in hunting. When I began my research into this painting, I thought that hunting would be considered a masculine activity in this painting’s original context of 17th-century Flanders, but it turned out to be less the case than I expected. While men such as Archduke Albert, Governor General of Flanders, are more often mentioned as participants in the hunt, his wife Isabella Clara Eugenia was also responsible for making hunting a staple in aristocratic society at the time, and there are accounts of her and other women, including the queen, often partaking in these hunts. Some women liked to identify as “devoted followers” of Diana, Roman goddess of the hunt, to show their enthusiasm for this activity.

Hunting wasn’t a display of power associated with gender so much as with class.

Laws were put in place so only the exclusive few could participate. Those who were able flaunted their prestige by killing much more game than they needed, often littering the forest floor with the corpses they weren’t able to carry home.

Expanding on the choices in the work that come together to make the hunt as this garish, and excessive display, comes the potential sexual connotations of many of its elements. The artist, Frans Snyders, has been thought to hold sexuality as a moral decision, something natural, yet better when controlled and chaste. Erotic temptation was seen as offering a sensual pleasure parallel to that of excessive materiality, so
sexual symbolism was used to enhance the commentary on unhinged wealth, implying it sins of lust and gluttony.

Finches were symbols of fertility, and the partridges, hare, and even potentially boar & deer sometimes served as symbols of lechery. Artichokes were thought to be aphrodisiacs, and melons were frequently used as allusions to female genitalia. The fruit, generally, could also evoke the Garden of Eden. That suggestion of an abundant paradise is overshadowed by the bodies of dead animals piled far beyond moderation, bringing this still life into gluttonous rather than heavenly territory.

How might the audience effect the painting's impact? Do you think the hunters or huntresses who encountered this painting would have reveled in or recoiled from this eroticized, bloody vision? Would those outside of aristocracy have reacted the same way?