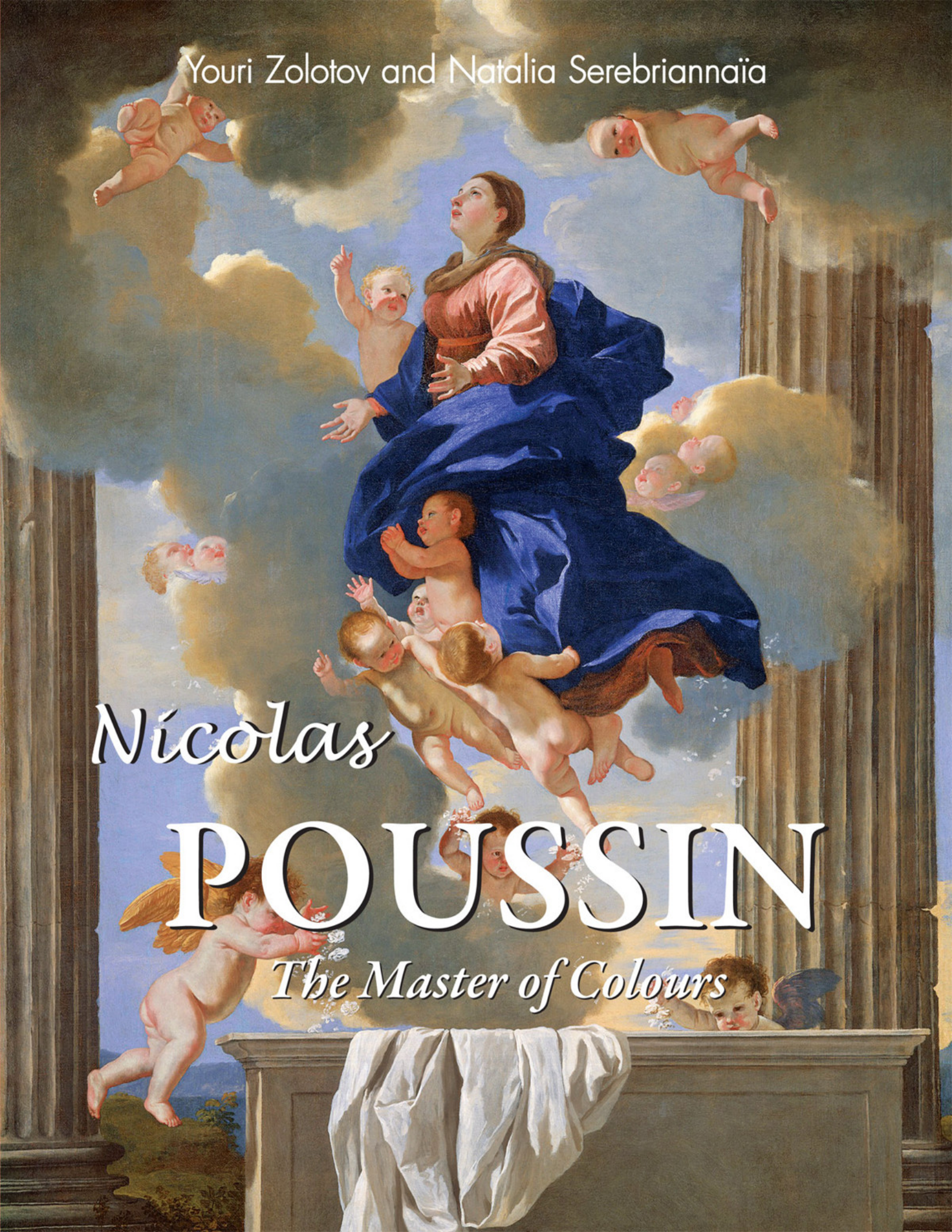


Youri Zolotov and Natalia Serebriannaïa

*Nicolas*

**POUSSIN**

*The Master of Colours*





Youri Zolotov and Natalia Serebriannaïa

# **Nicolas Poussin**

## The Master of Colours

*Collections of the Russian Museums  
Paintings and Drawings*



© 2022, Confidential Concepts, Worldwide, USA

© 2022, Parkstone Press USA, New York

© **Image-Bar** [www.image-bar.com](http://www.image-bar.com)

All rights reserved. No part of this may be reproduced or adapted without the permission of the copyright holder, throughout the world.

Unless otherwise specified, copyright on the works reproduced lies with the respective photographers. Despite intensive research, it has not always been possible to establish copyright ownership. Where this is the case, we would appreciate notification.

ISBN: 978-1-63919-963-1

# Contents

[His Youth And Education](#)

[The Conquest Of Rome](#)

[Parisian Interlude: Prelude To Works Of Maturity.](#)

[Methods And Principles Of A Demiurge](#)

[Russian Museums: Holders Of The Master's Secrets](#)

[Biography.](#)

[List Of Illustrations](#)

N. Pouffin.



EFFIGIES NICOLAI POGGINI ANDEL-  
YENSIS PICTORIS. ANNO ETATIS 1656  
ROMÆ ANNO IVBILEI  
1650.





*Portrait of the Artist*, 1650. Oil on canvas, 98 x 74 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris.

## HIS YOUTH AND EDUCATION

Nicolas Poussin, a great artist of the seventeenth century, was born in Normandy in 1594. Although he referred to himself as being from the small Normandy town of Les Andelys, it is thought by some that he actually came from Villers, a nearby village. The scenery of Poussin's native land is striking in its majestic beauty: the wide bed of the Seine, forced by bare rocky cliffs, makes a smooth turn around stately wooded hills. On top of one of the hills are the mediaeval ruins of the Chateau Gaillard, formidable even today.

The buildings of Les Andelys stretch along a tributary to the Seine, which flows through a wide valley encircled by steep hills. Winding roads lead up to neighbouring villages. Amid such magnificence, it is easy to understand the effect of the impressions of Poussin's childhood and adolescence on his future work.

Undoubtedly, the striking native scenery helped shape his perception of the world. The future artist could not fail to know the wonderful stained-glass panels and reliefs of the town church which had been created by Renaissance masters of the sixteenth century. Though not of the first magnitude, these Renaissance artists gave the young Poussin, through their works, the opportunity to study classic artistic traditions and to develop a feel for plasticity of form and compositional rhythm.

Unfortunately, Poussin's contemporary biographers did not mention any facts of his youth and artistic formation. It is known, however, that he was noticed by Quentin Varin, a painter who came to Les Andelys to execute altarpieces for the local church. Although the visiting artist might have helped the talented young man with his advice, the typical late Mannerist style of the altarpieces, dated 1612, prevents regarding Varin as Poussin's teacher.



That same year Poussin left for Paris where, judging by further developments, no patronage was awaiting him to facilitate the start of his career. A nobleman from Poitou gave the beginning artist shelter. An episode told by Poussin's Italian biographer, Giovanni Pietro Bellori, sheds light on their relationship: when after some time the nobleman took Poussin to his castle in Poitou, his mother kept the young artist busy with "domestic affairs, not leaving him even a moment for his art." In other words, Poussin was considered a servant.

Proud, the young artist left his patron and headed back to Paris on foot. On his way, he stopped at Blois, to execute altarpieces for the church there, and in Cheverny, to paint a few Bacchanals commissioned by the lord of the castle. None of the Bacchanals survived, but they were seen by André Félibien, the artist's French biographer, who wrote that Poussin "was very young when he did them" and that "one cannot fail to recognize in them the manner of this excellent painter." As familiar with Poussin's work as Félibien was, his statement testifies to the artist's early formation. It is known, however, that nothing has survived from his Normandy period, and practically nothing from his years in Paris (1612-23). The modern view of Poussin took shape based on his work done at a more mature age, the mists of the centuries obscuring the image of the young artist. This, in part, explains the surprise now elicited by the remark of Giambattista Marino, an Italian poet and Poussin's contemporary, which characterized the youthful Poussin as being filled with a "devilish ardour". With this in mind, the dissatisfaction felt by Poussin at the studios of Parisian artists becomes more understandable. According to Bellori,

"he was striving for knowledge but found neither a teacher nor lessons to meet his aspirations... Over a short period he changed two teachers; one of little talent, the other — Ferdinand the Fleming — praised for his portraits; but both failed to further their gifted student's understanding of the invention of historical scenes or the beauty of natural forms."

These two teachers of Poussin were Ferdinand Elle and, most likely, Georges Lallemand. Poussin, according to another seventeenth-century author, left Lallemand's studio after a month, or perhaps even less, and stayed in Elle's for about three months, indicative of his disillusionment.

It is not by chance that biographers, after criticizing his teachers, proceed to relate Poussin's discovery of engravings from the works of Raphael. The great Renaissance traditions proved to be the most attractive for the young artist, serving as compensation for the weakness of his casual Parisian teachers. A late seventeenth-century art treatise explains this as follows:

"Painting also gains from prints, and even to a greater degree than architecture, since they have given solid training to many artists. This is demonstrated by Marcantonio's engravings after Raphael's drawings, which taught many great graphic artists good taste in drawing. The famous Poussin is a good example of this, since during his youth in Paris he drew from excellent prints. It was then that this great painter fortunately appreciated the manner of Raphael and antiquity, which he successfully followed in all of his wonderful works."









*Rest during the Flight from Egypt*, around 1627. Oil on canvas, 76.2 x 63.5 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



*Joshua's Victory over the Amorites*, 1625-1626. Oil on canvas, 97.5 x 134 cm. Pushkin Museum, Moscow.



*Joshua's Victory over the Amalekites*, around 1624-1625. Oil on canvas, 97.5 x 134 cm. Hermitage, Saint Petersburg.

After Poussin's unavailing stay in Poitou, his Paris life continued to be difficult. Poor health forced him to go back to his native Normandy for an entire year. Poussin returned to Paris (the exact date is unknown) and his painting studies but soon started to look for a way to go to Italy and see its Renaissance and classical art — something scarce in Paris.

According to Bellori, "he first got no farther than Florence, from where, after an accident of some sort halted his progress, he went back to France." Bellori's casual mention of Florence, given the absence of details, is usually interpreted as an allusion to Poussin's abortive attempt to reach Rome.

But there is more to it than that. In the seventeenth century, it was difficult for a beginning artist without means to travel to Italy. If there was no rich patron, then other ways had to be found. Some artists, the most impulsive and reckless, entered the ranks of mercenary troops. Who, then, was responsible for financing Poussin's trip to Florence?

It is tempting to connect his trip with the construction and decoration of the Palais de Luxembourg. Built for the French

Queen, Marie de Médicis, it enlivened artistic life in Paris.

Back in 1611, Marie de Médicis asked her aunt, the Duchess of Tuscany, for the plans of the Palazzo Pitti, to be guided by them, “in the construction and decoration of my palace”. A few days later a builder was sent to Florence. Construction of the Palais de Luxembourg was started in 1615 and later Italian and French masters (especially those who had been to Italy, such as Guillaume Berthelot) were commissioned for its decoration. Shortly after Poussin arrived in Paris he made the acquaintance of a certain Courtois, referred to by Bellori as the “royal mathematician” and now thought to have been the Queen’s valet and custodian of the royal art collection.

There is also Félibien’s evidence. “Duchesne, then in charge of all painting work in the palace for Marie de Médicis, employed Poussin to execute a few small pieces for certain wainscots in the apartments.”

Though Félibien provides no date for the commission, the context indicates a relatively late stage of the work (the early 1620s). It is, however, enough to confirm Poussin’s connection with the decorators of the palace and to therefore allow for the possibility that Poussin’s journey to Florence was the result of some order from the court.

Whether this was the case or not, the first major Italian artistic centre visited by the young Poussin was Florence. While the French master’s artistic system was his own and independent, it was consistently based on the harmonious use of pure local colours, very much in keeping with the tradition of the Tuscan Quattrocento.

The strength of the impressions made on Poussin during his visit to Florence, brief as it was, is clearly revealed in his works. Considering the insignificance of his Paris lessons, Poussin’s visiting Florence before Venice and Rome possibly played a special role in his formation as an artist. “A few years later”, wrote Bellori, “a second attempt to travel to Italy was undertaken but it came to nought.”



During these early years in Paris, according to one of his contemporaries, Poussin thought *The Last Supper* by Frans Pourbus the Younger and a composition by Toussaint Dubreuil “the two most beautiful paintings he ever saw.”

In the work by Pourbus, Poussin was perhaps attracted by the calm balance of the compositional scheme. As for Dubreuil, a master of the so-called second Fontainebleau school, it was only natural that the young Norman’s attention is drawn to his painting. The artists working in the Royal Fontainebleau.

Palaces at the turn of the seventeenth-century were the most prominent figures in French art at the time. Moreover, they were considered to be continuing the traditions of the French Renaissance, for it was precisely at Fontainebleau that large fresco cycles were created in the sixteenth century.



*Rinaldo and Armida*, 1620s. Oil on canvas, 95 x 133 cm. Pushkin Museum, Moscow.