In the 17th century a style of art known as Baroque developed. It was especially well suited to large scale pictures—the kind of painting you would expect to find in a church or palace. There was most demand for works like this in Roman Catholic countries such as Italy, Flanders and Spain.

Painted ceilings were very fashionable at this time. The artists painted stone structures so cleverly, that from the ground they look real. The figures are also painted as though seen from below and appear to be floating through the air. This effect is known as "illusionism".

Studying ruins in Rome

Two French artists, Claude Lorrain and Nicolas Poussin, spent most of their working lives in Rome. Many of their paintings show the hills and plains around Rome. This type of painting is known as a "classical landscape". The figures are tiny. Roman ruins are often included, and the colours are soft greens, blues and browns.

The centre of Baroque art was Rome. Artists from all over Europe came to find out about the latest styles and fashions, and to study the great works of Ancient Rome and the High Renaissance. Many, like Caravaggio, Carracci, Claude and Poussin, made their homes there.
The Flemish painter, Peter Paul Rubens, worked in Italy as a young man. He learnt a great deal there. When he returned to Flanders his work was in such demand that he employed other artists to work in his studio and had teams of pupils and assistants. Often he did very little of a painting himself, but supervised each stage of the work.

Many of Rubens' paintings are on big canvases and are full of life. He developed a very dramatic, free way of painting, using big, energetic figures. This painting is called "The Battle of the Amazons".

Famous artists

Italy
AD 1560/1609 Annibale Caracci
AD 1573/1619 Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio

France
AD 1554/1625 Nicolas Poussin
AD 1600/1685 Claude Lorrain

Flanders
AD 1617/1640 Peter Paul Rubens
AD 1659/1641 Anthony van Dyck

Spain
AD 1599/1660 Diego Velazquez
AD 1617/1682 Bartolomé Esteban Murillo

Rubens was often used as a diplomat by his patrons, who included the rulers of France, Spain, England and Flanders. Here he presents Charles I of England with a painting from the King of Spain, who wanted peace with England.

At the Spanish court

In Spain, the most famous painter of this time was Diego Velazquez. He worked at court and painted many portraits of the king and his family. This one is of the young princess Margarita and Velazquez in his studio.