The Ascension of the Bourgeoisie

Since the late 18th century, the term bourgeois has described a certain culture and social class characterised by their ownership of capital. The term derives from the inhabitants of bourgs (walled cities or market-towns). The emergence of the bourgeoisie is both a historical as well as a political phenomenon which relates to commerce at the very beginning of capitalism and mass production. Most successful merchants, bankers and craftsmen played important roles within city governments and expressed their position through richly decorated houses. Cities were formed mainly on major trade routes. During the 17th and 18th centuries the bourgeoisie were the politically progressive social class who supported the principles of constitutional government and natural rights against the laws of privilege and claims of the divine right to rule that nobles and prelates had autonomously exercised during the feudal order. The motivations for the English Civil War (1642–51), the American War of Independence (1775–83) and the French Revolution (1789–99), in part, derived from the desire of the bourgeoisie to rid themselves of the feudal trammels and royal encroachments put upon their personal liberty, commercial rights and the ownership of property. Some of these personalities had military careers, following which they often joined city government. Most were newcomers to the nobility having gained estates after the end of Turkish occupation. The fortresses became a new type of city with a special political platform. The essence of bourgeois social-climbing is seen in self-promoting art and architecture which expresses the political power of its owner and his role in society. Bourgeois city palaces, which usually contain elements of the original medieval buildings, took an emerging position in the urban texture. The bourgeoisie became the new order of donors to the arts, frequently in the form of representative portraiture and hand-crafted luxury items.

Varaždin Merchant, Joannes Friedrich, in his Shop
Mid-18th century
City Museum, Varaždin
Varaždin, North-West Croatia, Croatia

Helblinghaus
Built in the 15th century, baroque redesign with stuccowork façade: c. 1730
Innsbruck, Tyrol, Austria

Almeida Fortress
1641–1680
Almeida, Guarda, Portugal

Portrait of Ferdinand Laffert, Royal Commissioner
1727
Budapest History Museum
Budapest, Közép-Magyarország / Central Hungary, Hungary

Portrait of Tommaso Campeggi and his Family
1663–1664
Malvezzi-Campeggi castle
Dozza, Bologna, Emilia-Romagna, Italy

Palazzo Davia Bargellini
1631–1658; 1730
Bologna, Emilia-Romagna, Italy