



LEFT
During the seventeenth century, new trade routes spread wealth through Europe, bringing spices, sugar, and more foodstuffs, which led to a fuller-figured beauty ideal (Jean Raoux, *A Woman at her Mirror*).

TOP RIGHT
C. 1600, Flemish artist Peter Paul Rubens painted portraits of women with ample curves, pink skin tones, and long, flowing hair, creating a genre known as Rubenesque (*The Three Graces*).

BOTTOM RIGHT
1643–1715, Louis XIV set the masculine ideal, as a fit and elegant monarch, who appears like the Greco-Roman god Apollo in portraits.



Renaissance Opulence

By the seventeenth century, many European countries were wealthy, thanks to the opening of new trade routes to distant lands. Populations could afford to eat well, and had a smorgasbord of food options—livestock, grains and cereals, spices, sugar. All of this, naturally, led to plumper bodies, which forged a new beauty aesthetic.

Fuller-figured women were depicted by artists of the day who glorified ample curves and rippling flesh on their canvases. Flemish painter Peter Paul Rubens was a champion of the genre, developing a style known as Rubenesque for its portrayal of voluptuous nudes, with puckered skin and pinky, flushed complexions, as seen in his *Venus and Adonis*, c. 1630. Given that the style mostly appealed to the male gaze, it's not exactly the harbinger of today's body-positivity movement. But, it planted a seed.

And men, of course, had their own standards to emulate. In the late seventeenth century, Louis XIV typified the masculine ideal. If you were an artist, you'd be strongly encouraged to depict the French monarch as having a striking likeness to the Greco-Roman god Apollo, a heroic figure who represented the pinnacle of handsomeness—slender, toned, stately. Louis cultivated an air of beauty that was positively mythical, eternally youthful. His preference for elaborate wigs, in particular, ignited a wig-wearing frenzy among the nobility and wealthy of the era.

Cosmetics also gained wider acceptance in this time, especially during the eighteenth-century reign of Marie Antoinette—history's most devoted beauty junkie, who certainly had fun with her daily toilette. Her elaborate grooming rituals included powders and paints, towers of hair and perfume applied in excess, all the time (she even carried a blend of rose, jasmine, and bergamot during her imprisonment in the Temple Tower of Paris).

Still, the over-arching and dominant view of femininity during this age centered around a woman's ability to carry out nature's so-called wishes, and procreate. Yes, a beautiful body type is one that is robust, healthy, and rosy, but in ways that will be fruitful for bearing children. In other words, it's a shape that is largely celebrated for its biological function, fertility, and ability to fulfill the desires of men.

Yet by the turn of the century, change was in the air in Europe and America. Ideas about individualism and personal liberty would soon spark a revolution.