



CARAVAGGIO AND THE PAINTERS OF THE NORTH

21 June to 18 September 2016

Curator: Gert Jan van der Sman

From 21 June to 18 September 2016, the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza will be presenting *Caravaggio and the Painters of the North*, an exhibition that focuses on Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (Milan, 1571 – Porto Ercole, 1610) and his influence on the northern European artists who were fascinated by his painting and disseminated his style. Curated by Gert Jan van der Sman, professor at the University of Leiden and a member of the Istituto Universitario Olandese di Storia dell'Arte in Florence, the exhibition analyses the artist's legacy and the wide variety of responses that his work provoked.

On display will be 53 paintings, twelve of them by Caravaggio, loaned from private collections, museums and institutions such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, the Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, the Hermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg, the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, and the church of San Pietro in Montorio in Rome. The exhibition will offer a survey of Caravaggio's career from his Roman period to the moving dark paintings of his final years, shown alongside a selection of works by his most important followers in Holland (Dirk van Baburen, Gerrit van Honthorst and Hendrick Ter Brugghen), Flanders (Nicolas Régnier and Louis Finson) and France (Simon Vouet, Claude Vignon and Valentin de Boulogne).

Between 1600 and 1630 more than two thousand artists settled in Rome, of whom a third were foreigners who transformed the city into an artistic melting-pot. To an equal or even greater extent than the Italians, the northern European painters opted to follow Caravaggio's style for two principal reasons: the lesser importance of the classical element in the northern pictorial tradition, and the suitability of Caravaggio's style for application outside the traditional context of a studio or drawing academy.

Images from left to right: Caravaggio, *The musicians* (1596-1597). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York / Caravaggio. *The Fortune Teller* (1595-1596). Musei Capitolini, Roma

More information and images:

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In the Low Countries and Germanic regions working from life through the observation of visible elements taken from the surrounding context was a firmly-rooted tradition. This established a link with the manner of working characteristic of Caravaggio, whose Lombard origins predisposed him to paint *ad vivum*, an approach that artists with a classical training considered inadequate in that it represented an obstacle to achieving perfection in art.

In addition, most of the Dutch, Flemish and French painters who settled in Rome had received a basic training in drawing and painting in their native regions and were particularly interested in rapidly capturing and assimilating new ideas. Caravaggio's art thus appealed to them, not only for the possibility of working from life but also for its emphasis on the use of light, shadow and colour. The foreign painters were able to assimilate this style into their own without the restrictions implied by a study programme.

Caravaggio and the Painters of the North transports visitors to the era of Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio and the decades following his death, a period particularly rich in masterpieces of painting and when his fame was still at its height. The exhibition opens with two galleries devoted to works by Caravaggio executed during his time in Rome and which reveal his multi-faceted career. The following galleries show works by painters from north of the Alps who saw Caravaggio's works at first hand. The result of their impressions was manifested in the widest variety of ways, given that each brought their own contribution while also seeking out new modes of expression in both religious and secular art. The last two galleries are devoted to the work of Caravaggio and his foreign followers in Naples and southern Italy.

Caravaggio in Rome (1592 - 1606)

During his early years in the city Caravaggio executed paintings that were sold by art dealers for modest sums. These were genre scenes and still lifes with fruit and flowers, a speciality that he brought with him from Lombardy. With *Boy bitten by a Lizard* of around 1593-95 (cat. 2) the artist astonished his contemporaries both for the mimetic qualities of the vase of flowers and the youth's melodramatic expression. His depictions of characters typical of Roman street life, such as *The Fortune Teller* of 1595-96 (cat. 3) attracted the attention of painters and collectors. The artist's first patron, Cardinal Francesco Maria del Monte, offered him lodgings in the Palazzo Madama where Caravaggio painted *The Musicians* of 1595-96 (cat. 4) and *Saint Catherine of Alexandria* (cat. 6), revealing the rapid evolution of his technique from the brilliant and colourful palette of the former to the pronounced chiaroscuro of the latter.

Caravaggio's ability to bypass conventions and approach traditional themes with surprising originality is evident in *David with the Head of Goliath* of around 1598-99 (cat. 5).



Caravaggio. *Boy Bitten by a Lizard*, ca. 1593-1595. Fondazione di Studi di Storia dell'Arte Roberto Longhi, Florencia

The years 1596 and 1597 marked a turning point in the artist's career with the commission of two canvases – *The Calling of Saint Matthew* and *The Martyrdom of Saint Matthew* - for the Contarelli chapel in the church of San Luigi dei Francesi, in which Caravaggio combined his preference for painting from life and the depiction of popular figure types with a moving sense of drama. From the moment the work was displayed in public, during the Jubilee of 1600, Caravaggio became the artist most in demand in Rome, resulting in both public and private commissions for clients such as Maffeo Barberini, the future Pope Urban VIII, for whom the artist painted *The Sacrifice of Isaac* in 1603 (cat. 8), and the banker Ottavio Costa, who commissioned *Saint John the Baptist in the Desert* of 1602 (cat. 7).



Caravaggio. *The Sacrifice of Isaac*, 1603
Gallerie degli Uffizi, Florencia



Caravaggio. *Saint John Baptist in the Wilderness*, 1602. The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, acquired by William Rockhill Nelson Trust, Kansas City

Earliest admirers in Rome: Adam Elsheimer and Peter Paul Rubens

In 1600, when the German painter Adam Elsheimer (Frankfurt am Main, 1578 – Rome, 1610) settled in Rome, Caravaggio was completing his canvases for San Luigi dei Francesi. Peter Paul Rubens (Siegen, 1577 – Antwerp, 1640) arrived in the city a year later, by which time Caravaggio had already become widely known. Elsheimer and Rubens were the first northern European painters to make direct contact with his art.

Caravaggio's influence is evident in Rubens's first official commission in Rome to paint the altarpieces for the basilica of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme. His interest in Caravaggio is revealed in the powerful lighting of some elements in the compositions. In addition, Rubens made use of the Caravaggesque figure type of the seductive youth with black curly hair in his *Head of a young Man* of 1601-02 (cat. 11).

During his second period in the city, from 1605 to 1608, he painted *The Adoration of the Shepherds* in 1608 (cat. 12) using a pronounced chiaroscuro in the area that includes the angels. Rubens also played a key role in the acquisition of the controversial *Death of the Virgin* for the Duke of Mantua's collection. Caravaggio's painting had been rejected by the Carmelite nuns of Santa Maria della Scala due to the realism employed in the depiction of the Virgin. Following his return to Flanders, Rubens was again inspired by Caravaggio's paintings on various occasions, including his celebrated free copy of *The Entombment of Christ*, of which a drawing is included in the exhibition (cat. 13).

Artists and art lovers: *Quadri da stanza* and *quadri d'altare*

In addition to owning fifteen works by Caravaggio, the brothers Benedetto and Vincenzo Giustiniani assisted numerous foreign painters to obtain commissions. They also offered accommodation in their house to Gerard van Honthorst (Utrecht, 1592-1656), David de Haen (Rotterdam, 1597(?) – Rome, 1622) and Nicolas Régnier (Maubeuge, ca.1588 – Venice, 1667). Dirck van Baburen (Wijk bij Duurstede, ca.1594 – Utrecht, 1624) was also fortunate in finding a patron shortly after his arrival in Rome, the Spaniard Pedro Cosida, Philip III's ambassador in the city, whose patronage culminated in the decoration of his chapel in San Pietro in Montorio. One of Van Baburen's most admired works of his Roman period is *The Entombment of Christ* of 1617 (cat. 25) and it is possible that the artist met his patron through José de Ribera who, like him, had arrived in the capital after passing through Parma.



Dirck van Baburen. *The Entombment*, 1617.
Iglesia de San Pietro in Montorio, Capilla de la Pietà, Roma



Hendrick ter Brugghen. *Flute Player*, 1621. Museumslandschaft Hessen Kassel, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister

Hendrick ter Brugghen and the Utrecht School

Hendrick ter Brugghen (The Hague (?) – Utrecht, 1629) was the first of the Dutch painters who, following a period in Rome, returned in 1614 to his native country where he introduced Caravaggio's characteristic subjects and stylistic formulas. In *The Supper at Emmaus* of 1616 (cat. 28) and *The Calling of Saint Matthew* of around 1617-19 (cat. 29) Ter Brugghen adopted Caravaggio's compositional format using a brilliant palette notable for its subtle gradations of colour and the painstaking depiction of the wrinkles of the skin, drapery folds, tones of the headdresses and the reflection of light on objects.

The return to Utrecht between 1620 and 1621 of Gerard van Honthorst and Dirck van Baburen influenced Ter Brugghen's stylistic evolution and a healthy rivalry arose between these painters which resulted in an intention to emulate or surpass each other in works such as *Boy playing a Recorder* (cat. 30) and *The Flute Player* (cat. 31), both of 1621, which Ter Brugghen painted as a response to Baburen's half-length figures of musicians such as *Young Man singing* of 1622 (cat. 34). Over time Honthorst's palette became more brilliant and colourful, as evident in paintings such as his *Merry Company* of 1622 (cat. 35).

The French painters in Rome



Simon Vouet. *David with the Head of Goliath*, 1621. Musei di Strada Nuova, Palazzo Bianco, Génova

This gallery displays work by French artists active in Rome between 1610 and 1630, representing a particularly interesting group due to their social and cultural diversity. Among the foreign painters living in the city Simon Vouet (Paris, 1590 – 1649) enjoyed a more privileged position than most. Son of a court painter, he grew up in Paris and had access to the court from an early age. Following a brief period in Venice, he settled in Rome in 1613/14 where he received a regular stipend from the French court. The official nature of his residence in Rome brought him notable prestige in artistic circles and the favour of leading collectors, for whom he executed works such as *David victorious over Goliath* of 1621 (cat. 41).

Claude Vignon (Tours, 1593 – Paris, 1670) also came from a prosperous background as the son of a valet de chambre. Vignon was born in Tours, a habitual place of residence of the French monarchs, and grew up in Paris. Having arrived in Rome in 1609/1610, in 1616 to 1617 he went to Spain and Paris and it is likely that he painted his impressive *Martyrdom of Saint Matthew* of 1617 (cat. 36) in France. Vignon's friendship with Vouet helped his career in Rome.

The situation of these two painters contrasts with the struggle for success on the part of Valentin de Boulogne (Coulommiers, 1531 – Rome, 1632). Some years would pass before the artist found a committed patron in the form of Francesco Barberini. Boulogne's biographer Giovanni Baglione associated his manner of painting from life with his dissolute lifestyle. Like Caravaggio, Boulogne executed large compositions by painting directly on the canvas. Despite the complexity of his creations, such as *David with the Head of Goliath and two Soldiers* of ca.1616-18 (cat. 40), there is no evidence that he prepared his compositions with preliminary drawings or studies.



Valentin de Boulogne. *David with the Head of Goliath and two Soldiers*, ca. 1616-1618. Madrid, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza

Caravaggio and his followers in Naples and southern Italy

Among the foreign painters living in Naples and influenced by Caravaggio, two are particularly outstanding: Louis Finson (Bruges, ca.1580 – Amsterdam, 1617) and Matthias Stom ((?) ca.1600 – northern Italy (?) after 1649). The former is the only northern Caravaggesque painter

who probably knew the artist in person, while Stom was the last of his followers, producing an oeuvre that reveals Caravaggio's influence until around 1640.

Finson settled in Naples in 1605 where he began to collaborate with Abraham Vinck, a painter specialising in portraits. It is thought that Caravaggio made friends with both of them and when he left for Malta in 1607 he entrusted them with two of his paintings, *Judith and Holofernes* and *The Madonna of the Rosary*. In 1612 Finson settled in the south of France where he enjoyed considerable success painting in the style of Caravaggio. He died in Amsterdam in 1617 in the house of his friend and associate Vinck. The paintings that the two took home were the first (and only) originals by Caravaggio that could be seen in the Low Countries.



Caravaggio. *The Martyrdom of Saint Ursula*, 1610
Colección Intesa Sanpaolo. Gallerie d'Italia - Palazzo
Zevallos Stigliano, Nápoles

Twenty years after Finson left Naples, Stom settled in that city. It is not known whether he was born in Amersfoort (near Utrecht) or in Flanders. It is possible that one of Stom's masters was Gerard van Honthorst who passed on to him his interest in candle-lit scenes. Stom's paintings depicting figures in the immediate foreground were among those that brought him success in Naples, where he ran his own studio from 1635 to around 1639. In the 1630s Stom's technique became more fluid and his colours brighter. He moved to Sicily where he executed various important public commissions. *The Flagellation of Christ* of around 1640 (cat. 54) is an extremely dynamic composition in which the life-size figures are illuminated in an exceptionally dramatic manner. Dominated by the chiaroscuro, this is an extremely theatrical presentation in which the idealised nude Christ contrasts with the rough appearance of his torturers in a final echo of Caravaggio.

The exhibition concludes with *The Martyrdom of Saint Ursula* of 1610 (cat. 46), in which Caravaggio depicted himself holding a lance at the moment when the King of the Huns wounds the saint with an arrow. Painted a few weeks before his death, it marks the high point of this final section of the exhibition.

STUDY DAY, CARAVAGGIO AND THE PAINTERS OF THE NORTH

On 30 June, the Museum is organising a study day focusing on the figure of this celebrated Italian artist. A series of lectures will trace Caravaggio's influence in both Rome and southern Italy, as well as the impact of his style on a large number of artists from France, the Low Countries and Germany. This study day will aim to emphasise the impact of Caravaggio's work on these masters and the pictorial schools of their respective places of origin while also taking into account his influence on modern artistic movements. In order to do so, this event is benefiting from the participation of art historians such as Tania de Nile and Antonio Ernesto Denunzio; university professors including Maria Cristina Terzaghi of the University of Rome; curators such as Teresa Posada Kubissa, Head of the Department of Dutch Painting at the

Museo del Prado; Guillermo Solana, Artistic Director of the Museo Thyssen; and the exhibition's curator, Gert Jan van der Sman.

EXHIBITION INFORMATION

Title: *Caravaggio and the Painters of the North*

Organiser: Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza

Venue and dates: Madrid, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, 21 June to 18 September 2016

Curator: Gert Jan van der Sman, professor at the University of Leiden and member of the Istituto Universitario Olandese di Storia dell'Arte in Florence (University of Utrecht)

Project director: Mar Borobia, Head of the Department of Old Master Painting at the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza

Technical curator: Dolores Delgado, Curator of Old Master Painting at the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza

Number of works: 53

Publications: Catalogue with texts by Gert Jan van der Sman, Marije Osnabrugge, Francesca Cappelletti, Giovanna Capitelli and Annick Lemoine and biography by Dolores Delgado; educational guide and digital publication on the "Thyssen Kiosk" app.

VISITOR INFORMATION

Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza

Address: Paseo del Prado, 8. 28014, Madrid

Opening times: Tuesdays to Fridays and Sundays, 10am to 7pm. Saturdays, 10am to 9pm

From 1 July to 4 September: Tuesdays to Saturdays, 10am to 10pm; Sundays, 10am to 7pm. Last entry one hour before closing time.

Single entry ticket: Permanent Collection plus temporary exhibitions:

- Standard ticket: 12 Euros
- Reduced price ticket: 8 Euros for visitors aged over 65, pensioners, students and Large Families with proof of status
- Free entry: children aged under 12 and officially unemployed Spanish citizens

Advance ticket sales from the Museum's ticket desks, on its website and on tel: 902 760 511

More information: www.museothyssen.org

Audioguide: available in various languages

PRESS INFORMATION:

<http://www.museothyssen.org/microsites/prensa/2016/Caravaggio/index.html>