

THE INFLUENCE OF CARAVAGGIO

■ BY LUCY GORDAN

The year 2016 featured many exhibitions in Europe and in the United States about Caravaggio and his followers; four will continue well into 2017. They are 1) the monographic "Beyond Caravaggio" at the National Gallery in London until January 15th, 2017, then at the National Gallery of Ireland in Dublin from February 11-May 14, and at the Royal Scottish Academy in Edinburgh from June 17-September 24; 2) "Valentin de Boulogne, Beyond Caravaggio" at the Metropolitan in New York until January 22, 2017 and then at the Louvre from February 22-May 22; 3) "Artemisia Gentileschi and Her Times," only at the Museo di Roma until May 7th (to be a forthcoming "Of Books, Art, and People" topic); and 4) "The Origin of Still Life in Italy: Caravaggio and The Master of Hartford," only at Rome's Villa Borghese until February 19th.

"Beyond Caravaggio" in London is the first major exhibition in the United Kingdom to explore the influence of Caravaggio (1571-1610) on the art of his contemporaries: in particular Orazio Gentileschi, Valentin de Boulogne, and Gerrit Van Honthorst. After the unveiling of Caravaggio's first public work, *The Calling of St. Matthew* in the Contarelli Chapel in Rome's Church of San Luigi dei Francesi in 1599-1600, artists across Europe came to Rome to see his work. As the exhibition's press release tells us: "Seduced by the pictorial and narrative power of his paintings, many went on to imitate their naturalism and dramatic lighting."

"Paintings by Caravaggio and his followers," continues the press release, "were highly sought after in the decades following his untimely death at the



Michelangelo Merisi (1571-1610) was known as Caravaggio. Here, his *Supper at Emmaus*, now in London's National Gallery and in London's "Beyond Caravaggio"

age of just 39. However, by the end of the mid-17th century, the "Caravaggesque" style had fallen out of favor [because of a prevailing preference for classicism] and it would take almost 300 years, [until the 1930s] for Caravaggio's reputation to be restored and for his artistic accomplishments to be fully recognized."

Bringing together exceptional works by Caravaggio, only six out of 49 paintings, and the Italian, French, Flemish, Dutch, and Spanish artists he inspired — Bartolomeo Manfredi, Carlo Saraceni, Jusepe de Ribera, Artemisia Gentileschi and Guido Reni — "Beyond Caravaggio" examines the international artistic phenomenon known as "Caravaggism."

Valentin de Boulogne (1591-1632) was the greatest French follower of Caravaggio and one of the outstanding artists of the 17th century. In the years following Caravaggio's death, de Boulogne emerged as one of the most original protagonists of this new, naturalistic style of painting.

"Valentin de Boulogne: Beyond Caravaggio," the Met's press release recounts, "is the first monographic exhibition devoted to this artist who is little known because his career [like Caravaggio's] was short-lived — he died at age 41 — and so his works are rare. Around 60 paintings by Valentin survive, and this exhibition at the Met has brought together 45 of them, from Rome, Vienna, Munich, Madrid, London, and Paris, for the Louvre possesses the large majority of his works."

In a short documentary, Keith Christiansen, the John Pope-Hennessy Chairman of the Department of European Paintings at the Met, explains that, like Caravaggio, Valentin "shifts from Raphael's and Michelangelo's



Three works by artist Valentin de Boulogne: *St. John the Baptist* (a self-portrait), *Judith Beheading Holofernes*, and *The Fortune Teller*



...elevated vision of art to a populist
...ne." The artist painted directly from a
...posed model and his works, because
...ey are cropped as a photographer
...ould today, have a quality of real
...essence. "You are no longer the view-
...looking through a framed picture,"
...continued Christiansen, "but you are a
...rticipant."

Another similarity to Caravaggio is
...Valentin's subject matter: his self-port-
...raits, the martyrdom of saints, Judith
...beheading Holofernes, merry-making,
...musicians, and card-and-dice-players.

Orazio Gentileschi (1563-1639),
...Artemisia's father, was a personal
...friend of Caravaggio, and Artemisia
...1593-1653), the first great woman
...tist, like her father, was certainly
...fluenced by him. Although she did not die young like both Car-
...avaggio and Valentin, like them she had a hard life (never recovering
...om her rape made public by her father in an unsatisfactory trial of
...er assailant with an unfair verdict) and was always struggling for
...ditional commissions. Like those in London's "Beyond Caravag-
...o" and "Valentin de Boulogne: Beyond Caravaggio," the paintings
..."Artemisia Gentileschi e il suo tempo" ("Artemisia Gentileschi
...nd Her Times") depict Biblical subjects and include many self-port-
...raits. Very popular with all three artists is the story of Judith behead-
...g Holofernes.

"The Origins of Still Life in Italy: Caravaggio and The Master of
...Hartford" counts some 40 paintings but includes only three canvass-
...s by Caravaggio, two of which are
...self-portraits, but no Bible stories. The
...two housed in the Villa Borghese
...allery since 1607 are self-portraits
...nd early works by Caravaggio. They
...ere painted shortly after his arrival in
...ome from Lombardy and came to this
...allery because they belonged to Car-
...dinal Scipione Borghese, the founder
...f this world-famous museum, then his
...personal art gallery, so it is not only a
...creation, but also the crucial protagon-
...ist and *leitmotif* of this exhibition.

Ottaviano Borghese, the mother of
...Scipione Borghese (1577-1633), was
...the sister of Camillo Borghese, who
...became Pope Pius V in 1605. He
...quickly conferred a cardinalship on his
...nephew and gave him the right to use
...the Borghese name and coat of arms.

"In the classic pattern of papal
...epotism," *Wikipedia* tells us, "Cardi-
...al Borghese wielded enormous power
...s the Pope's secretary and effective
...head of the Vatican government. On his
...own and the Pope's behalf he amassed

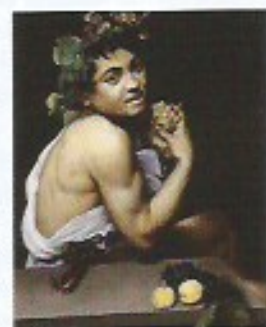


Artemisia Gentileschi (1593-1653): Judith Beheading Holofernes

...enormous fortune through papal fees
...and taxes, and acquired vast land hold-
...ings for the Borghese family."

"Pope Paul V," continues *Wikipedia*,
..."willingly assisted his nephew's efforts
...to obtain the artworks that aroused his
...interest. For instance, through the influ-
...ence of his uncle, Borghese secured the
...cooperation of the parish priest in
...arranging to have Raphael's famous
...Deposition stolen from the Baglioni
...family chapel in the Church of St. Fran-
...cis, Perugia, for which it had been
...commissioned a century before. Then
...on July 31, 1607, Paul V ordered 105
...pictures confiscated from the very suc-
...cessful artist [impresario, merchant, and
...collector] Cavalier d'Arpino (1568-
...1640), who had been unable to pay his

full tax bill [though Davide Dotti, one of the two curators of this
...exhibition, told me that the charge was that Arpino had not paid for
...his gun license], and he had them delivered to his nephew. Among
...the pictures that Borghese acquired through this seizure were these
...two important early works by Caravaggio (both 1593, still in Galle-
...ria Borghese): a probable self-portrait, usually called *Sick Bacchus*,
...and *Boy with a Basket of Fruit*, an image of a youth (again proba-
...bly a self-portrait) extending a large basket of fruit seductively
...towards the viewer." Although not the earliest Italian still lifes, they
...are certainly Caravaggio's earliest, as is the exact same fruit basket
...in his *Supper at Emmaus*, now in London's National Gallery and in
...London's "Beyond Caravaggio."



Caravaggio, a probable self-portrait, usually called *Sick Bacchus*,
...and *Boy with a Basket of Fruit*

Below, Caravaggio's masterpiece still life *The Basket of Fruit*



Although still life paintings were
...considered of secondary importance
...because they did not depict Bible sto-
...ries, they have a definite connection to
...religion: their dying flowers, decaying
...fruit, fluttering butterflies, and dead
...animals are an intentional reminder of
...the passage of time and mortality, as
...are the objects included: dear to the
...commissioner or painter, but not nec-
...essarily to the viewer.

Some scholars believe still lifes are
...a metaphor for the Church.

Also in this second of the exhibi-
...tion's six sections: 1) The Lombard
...Origins of the Italian Still Life, 2) Car-
...avaggio and The Hartford Master, 3)
...The First Specialists of Caravaggesque
...Still Lifes, 4) Marquis Crescenzi's
...Academy, 5) Agostino Verrocchi: A
...Caravaggio Painter on the Way to the
...Baroque and 6) The Genius of the An-
...onymous are Caravaggio's third canvas
...and masterpiece still life, *The Basket of
...Fruit* (1597-1601), in exchange for
...three months from the Ambrosiana

Gallery in Milan for Villa Borghese's *St. Jerome Writing*, and four canvases by The Master of Hartford. This unknown artist gets his name from the city of Hartford in Connecticut because one of his 10 known paintings, *A Vase of Flowers and Fruit on a Table* belongs to Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art there. One other, *A Shelf with Grapes, Peaches, A Vase of Flowers, Other Fruits, and Butterflies*, belongs to the Gallerie Estensi in Modena. Two others, *A Vase of Flowers, Fruit and Vegetables* and *Birds of Game and Owl* belong to the Galleria Borghese with the other seven, two of which are displayed here, being in private collections.

This exhibition marks the first time that Caravaggio's two self-portraits and The Master of Hartford's works have been reunited after 400 years. The Master of Hartford's works too were probably among the paintings stolen from Cavaliere d'Arpino.

From similar subjects in the works of both Caravaggio and The Master of Hartford, almost certainly an Italian and the first artist to devote himself entirely to the painting of still lifes, we know that they certainly were both members of Arpino's *bottega* and that the papal tax collectors had made their inventory too quickly to note exact details, so we have no record of Caravaggio's earliest pre-1597 works.

Instead *The Basket of Fruit*, a frequent theme of the frescoes



Master of Hartford, *A Vase of Flowers and Fruit on a Table*

and mosaics of ancient Roman houses, was a gift from Cardinal Del Monte, Caravaggio's first influential patron, to Federico Borromeo, the Archbishop of Milan, an avid collector who founded the Galleria Ambrosiana there. For many years, it was believed that this small definitely reused canvas was originally part of a larger painting that perhaps contained religious figures, but X-rays have excluded that possibility.

Of interest in the first section are the earliest known Italian still lifes, all by Lombards: Vincenzo Campi's *The Fruit-*

seller, Giuseppe Arcimboldo's *The Greengrocer*, and the earliest of all Italian still lifes, Giovanni Ambrogio Figo's *Metal Plate with Figs and Vine Leaves* (1590-94). The only other two identifiable Italian painters with works here are Giovanni Battista Crescenzi (1577-1635) who founded a painting academy near the Pantheon, his student Pietro Paolo Bonzi, and Agostino Verocchio (1586-1659), all known for their still lifes.

Many of the other works are only attributable, as with "The Master of Hartford," to "The Master of the Little Vessels," "The Master of Rose Apples" or "The Master of Still Life."

An exhibition dedicated to Caravaggio will open at Milan's Palazzo Reale in September 2017 for the 400th anniversary of his death, even though seven years after the fact. ☉

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