

INTRODUCTION

The exhibition, presented in two venues, the Museum and Royal Park of Capodimonte and the Pio Monte della Misericordia, seeks to reconstruct the 18 months Caravaggio spent in Naples during his two stays in 1606-1607 and 1609-1610, revealing the influence of his painting on local artists, his relations with patrons from different social backgrounds and the channels for the spread of Caravaggio's realism in 17th-century European art. Caravaggio arrived in Naples for the first time in October 1606. In the capital of the Vice-Regency, he was preceded by his fame and the works of those artists, such as Belisario Corenzio, who had seen his paintings in Rome but failed to change the stylistic course of the local artistic tradition, oscillating between devotional painting and the refined and exquisite style of late Mannerism. The display of the great canvas Caravaggio painted for the Pio Monte della Misericordia, in early 1607, on the high altar of the church of the same name, sufficed to change pictorial trends in the Vice-Regency forever. But Caravaggio's relationship with Naples was not all one way: the Neapolitan milieu offered the painter a new world from which to draw faces, lights and shadows. He painted several works here: some to be taken elsewhere, others, like the *Flagellation*, to remain in the city, all leaving a mark, representing a new direction in local art circles.

Caravaggio 1606 - 1610 fleeing south On May 28, 1606, Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio slew Ranuccio Tomassoni in a brawl while playing court tennis. Sentenced to death, he fled from Rome with the help of various members of the Colonna family: first Costanza and then Marzio, who welcomed him to their feuds of Zagarolo and Paliano, immune from papal jurisdiction. Arriving in Naples in October 1606, "He immediately found employment, since his manner and name were well known," as Bellori records. Caravaggio painted two works in large format, the *Seven Works of Mercy* and the *Flagellation*, as well as other devotional paintings, including two versions of *Salome with the Head of John the Baptist*. In Naples he met Louis Finson and Abram Vink, who helped him take his first steps in Neapolitan society and later became copyists of his works, enabling them to circulate on the market. In June 1607 Caravaggio moved to Malta, where he hoped to become a Knight of Jerusalem, but he was arrested after a brawl and fled to Sicily. After staying in Syracuse, Messina and Palermo, he returned to Naples, and in the autumn of 1609 he was waylaid and wounded near the inn of Cerriglio, so that the chronicles reported he was dead. During this second stay he produced other works, including paintings for the Fenaroli Chapel in the church of Sant'Anna dei Lombardi, now lost, and the *Martyrdom of Saint Ursula*, today in the Gallerie d'Italia - Palazzo Zevallos Stigliano. Probably after being pardoned by Paul V, early in July he sailed for Rome in a felucca, taking some paintings for Scipione Borghese with him, but in Palo he was arrested and the boat, with its precious cargo, returned to Naples without the painter who, meanwhile, dragged himself to Porto Ercole,

The Pio Montedella Misericordia

In turbulent Naples, with a rapidly growing population, in 1602 a group of young aristocrats formed the lay confraternity of the Pio Monte della Misericordia, with the purpose of practicing the seven corporal works of mercy. In October 1606, while the first meeting place of the Pio Monte was being built to a project by Giovan Giacomo Conforto, Caravaggio reached Naples. As soon as he arrived, he was given a very important commission on a subject he had never dealt with: *Our Lady of Mercy*. Its influence on Neapolitan painting were overwhelming for those, like Battistello Caracciolo, ready to receive the novelty. The decoration of the ancient and simple church of the Pio Monte was taking shape when Caravaggio had already left for Malta. In the meantime, the Roman painter Giovanni Baglione had been commissioned to depict the work of mercy of *Burying the Dead*, here exhibited, in competition with Caravaggio, whose painting, too small in format, was not exhibited in the new monumental church of the Pio Monte, where it was replaced by a canvas on the same subject by Luca Giordano.

The Flagellation

In the spring of 1607 Caravaggio received payments from Tommaso de Franchis for the *Flagellation* commissioned for his chapel in San Domenico Maggiore. In the painting the long column serves as the only spatial reference. Restoration and diagnostic analysis have revealed an addition to the right side of the canvas by the artist himself, which makes the composition slightly off-center to the left, in the same way as the *Flagellation* of Rouen, painted during Caravaggio's first stay in Naples. The canvas today in Rouen was the subject of copies, as shown in the exhibition, which can be considered slightly later than the original. Also in the wake of the work in Rouen is the *Flagellation* attributed to Fabrizio Santafede, an artist with a strong late Mannerist legacy, who produced several versions varying in quality after Caravaggio's painting, embodying his innovations. By contrast, the *Christ at the Column* by Battistello Caracciolo documents a very personal approach to the *Flagellation* formerly in San Domenico. The great Ribera also worked along the same lines. His long career in Naples proved fundamental in establishing a pictorial school that started from Caravaggio and acquired a truly extraordinary variety and quality in the works of its various artists.

Salome with the Head of the Baptist

While Caravaggio was in Malta, in Naples his works instilled many local artists with the urge to engage with reality and tackle certain subjects with new eyes. This is the case of the theme of *Salome with the Head of the Baptist*, of which Caravaggio painted the two versions today in London and Madrid. Battistello Caracciolo, whose close relationship with him can be deduced from a document that records that he received some money from Caravaggio for a painting of *St. Jerome*, also painted this subject and in the works in the exhibition reveals that he had been reflecting both on the London canvas in the pose of the executioner, and the one in Madrid in the treatment of the headsman behind sheathing his sword. The effects of observation of Caravaggio's compositions, reflecting the atrocious significance of the drama that has just taken place, are also found in the *Salome* by the very young Massimo Stanzione.

Between Rome and Naples

The drawing, a copy with variations of the *Calling of St. Matthew* in the Contarelli chapel in San Luigi dei Francesi in Rome and painted by Caravaggio in the early 17th century, is evidence of the work's great influence. A Greek artist, Corenzio arrived in Naples in the 1760s and made a copy of Caravaggio's painting. It is not known whether it was still unfinished or had already been completed during one of his visits to Rome, favored by the presence in the city of his uncle Giovanni Santamaura, a *scriptor* at the Vatican Library. The artist was clearly struck by the shaft of light falling on the back wall and reproduced it with cross-hatching in the drawing, stylistically close to those he made in the late 16th century.

The Crucifixion of Saint Andrew

The more or less close model for the paintings by Battistello, Stanzione, Finson and De Somer shown here was Caravaggio's *Crucifixion of St. Andrew* in the Cleveland Museum of Art. It was painted in Naples for the Viceroy Count Duke of Benavente, who took it to Spain in 1610 when his posting ended. The Flemish painter Louis Finson knew it well, having made copies of it. One of these was exported to Amsterdam with the attribution to Caravaggio (though some critics think it might be another version of the original). After his death in 1617 it was valued by a group of Flemish artists. In the *Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian* by Rugiers, painted in Marseille in 1615, restored for the occasion, Finson used a refined composition, taking the pose of the executioner on Sebastian's right from the Cleveland canvas.

The Mary Magdalene and the St. John Baptist

During his last days in Naples, Caravaggio painted some canvases for Cardinal Scipione Borghese and other prelates who had worked to win him a pardon from Paul V. He then took them with him on the felucca on his voyage back to Rome. However, after stopping in Palo, where he was mistakenly arrested, the boat sailed back to Naples and the only three surviving works were returned to Costanza Colonna Sforza, from whose residence at Chiaia, then Palazzo Cellamare, the artist had set off. A letter dated July 9, 1610, written to Cardinal Borghese only a few days after Caravaggio's death by Deodato Gentile, bishop of Caserta and his agent in Naples, records that the three paintings depicted a *Magdalene in Ecstasy* and two versions of *St. John*. Of the first, not yet identified with certainty by critics, numerous copies are known, including the two paintings by Louis Finson presented here, both signed and one dated 1613, which helped to spread the composition in Provence. Of the two versions of St John, one now in the Galleria Borghese was given to Cardinal Scipione in August 1611, after the Viceroy Count of Lemos had it copied in Naples. It became a model for many local artists, as shown by the very fine painting by Tanzio da Varallo which is exhibited for the first time, while the second, not yet traced, has been identified with a *Reclining St. John*. This was a model very common in the circle of the first followers of Caravaggio in Naples, from Battistello and Finoglio to the young Stanzione.

The Martyrdom of Saint Ursula

In the spring of 1610, the Genoese prince Marcantonio Doria commissioned Caravaggio to paint the *Martyrdom of Saint Ursula* in honor of his stepdaughter, a nun in Naples who bore the name of the saint. Departing from the traditional iconography, which included the presence of virgins, Ursula's companions, the artist reduced the number of figures and froze the culminating moment of martyrdom in a dramatic image, when the saint appears solemnly focused on the physicality of the wound. Behind her a man holds out his hand (revealed by restoration in 2004) as if wishing to stop the arrow already shot by the torturer, and the other figure, the painter's self-portrait, witnesses the scene open-mouthed. Lanfranco Massa, Doria's agent, carelessly put the work out to dry in the sun, so that Caravaggio had to repair the damage immediately before it was shipped. Massa was able to have it copied by Giovanni Bernardino Azzolino, a Neapolitan painter beloved by Marcantonio and the author of numerous replicas of Caravaggio's paintings, of which one of the most naturalistic is shown here, brought from the Pinacoteca Nazionale in Siena. The late, intense solutions of Caravaggio's *St. Ursula* are also reflected in Battistello Caracciolo's *Baptism of Christ* in the Pinacoteca Girolami and the *Martyrdom of St. Sebastian* by Filippo Vitale. Shortly before the *St. Ursula*, Caravaggio painted three lost canvases for the Fenaroli Chapel in Sant'Anna dei Lombardi in Naples. The *St. Francis* by Carlo Sellitto is a rare figurative trace of one of them.