

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

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**PRESS PREVIEW:
Tuesday, February 8, 1983
10 a.m. - 3 p.m.

17TH CENTURY PAINTINGS FROM NAPLES
ON VIEW AT NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

WASHINGTON, D.C. November 29, 1982. Painting in Naples from Caravaggio to Giordano, an exhibition chronicling the 17th century flowering of the art of painting in what was then one of Europe's three largest cities, goes on view at the National Gallery of Art's East Building from February 13, 1983 to May 1, 1983. Over 100 paintings span the period from the arrival of Caravaggio in Naples in 1606 through the end of Luca Giordano's career in 1705.

The exhibition in Washington is made possible by a generous grant from FIAT S.p.A., Turin, Italy, and The Banca Nazionale del Lavoro, Rome, Italy. It will be on view at the Grand Palais in Paris, beginning in May of 1983.

As the most active port in the Mediterranean, Naples was an international center, linked by trade to all of Europe and the East. Its many religious institutions and wealthy merchants were enthusiastic patrons of the arts, bringing the finest painters to the city from all over Italy and beyond.

Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio first appeared in Naples in September of 1606, a fugitive from justice in Rome where he had murdered Ranuccio Tommasoni after a tennis match.

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His revolutionary brand of realism and drama had already changed the course of Western painting, and his fame had preceded him in Naples. He quickly received several notable commissions.

The Seven Acts of Mercy for the high altar of Pio Monte della Misericordia and The Flagellation for the monastic church of San Domenico Maggiore, the largest works Caravaggio would paint in Naples, date from this first visit in 1606-1607 and open the exhibition. He returned in 1609-1610 after a trip to Sicily; important works on view from this second visit are the Denial of St. Peter and Martydom of St. Ursula.

Caravaggio's presence in Naples brought about an artistic revolution in which his powerful naturalism, dramatic light and compositional formats replaced the mannerist traditions and symbolic idioms of the late 16th century. His influence was immediate and profound.

Giovanni Battista Caracciolo, Caravaggio's earliest and most gifted Neapolitan follower, is represented by six paintings, including his Immaculate Conception of 1607, his earliest surviving work, and The Madonna of the Purification.

Caravaggio's impact was also felt by Jusepe de Ribera, who arrived in 1616 and spent almost all of his active career in Naples. Spanish by birth, he found ready patrons in a city ruled by Spanish viceroys. His mature style in turn exerted a strong influence in the city.

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Salvator Rosa (born 1615), a native Neapolitan known for his extravagant personality and many talents, worked in Naples until 1638-1639. His battle scenes and landscapes, such as Landscape with Travelers Asking the Way, incorporating the rustic terrain and seascapes of southern Italy, were extremely important for the subsequent development of European landscape painting and popular with later collectors, especially the English.

From the 1630s to the 1650s, a variety of non-Neapolitan Italian and foreign artists worked in Naples. Artemisia Gentileschi came from Rome, where she had been exposed to Caravaggio's work. The daughter of painter Orazio Gentileschi, Artemisia is one of the first major women artists in the history of Western art.

German artist Johann Heinrich Schönfeld worked in Naples from the mid 1630s through 1649; French painter Simon Vouet executed two important works for Neapolitan patrons though his actual presence in the city remains controversial. Bolognese painters such as Guido Reni, Domenichino and Lanfranco brought a revitalized classicism and academicism which counteracted the harsh realism of Caravaggio and Ribera.

This myriad of styles and influences gave rise to a truly Neapolitan school of painting in the work of Massimo Stanzione, Francesco Guarini, and most importantly, Bernardo Cavallino. In works such as Adoration of the Shepherds, The

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Feast of Absalom and The Finding of Moses, Cavallino combined the light of Caravaggio and classicism of the Bolognese in his own delicate, coloristic style which anticipates the rococo.

In 1656, the plague struck the crowded port city, exterminating half the population, including Bernardo Cavallino. Artistic recovery after this disastrous event was vigorous, however, and a new school of baroque painting was born.

Mattia Preti arrived in Naples in 1656 and stayed for four years, during which he achieved great local fame. Caravaggio and Ribera continued as important influences, as indicated by Preti's St. Sebastian, a powerful and dramatic interpretation of the subject. Commissioned by the nuns of S. Sebastiano, it was ultimately rejected by them because of the jealous intervention of Luca Giordano.

The most popular and well known of the Neapolitan baroque painters, Giordano trained in the circle of Ribera. After work in Rome, Florence and finally Venice, where he received several major commissions, he returned to the city in 1653. He developed a baroque style combining the naturalism of Ribera and the rich color of the Venetian masters, in works such as S. Gennaro Frees Naples From the Plague for the church of S. Maria del Pianto, and Phineas and His Companions Turned Into Stone, based on a subject from Ovid. Known for the speed and facility of his execution, he earned the characterization "Luca fa presto."

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Still life painting flourished in the city in the second half of the century. Artists such as Giacomo, Giovanni and Giuseppe Recco and Paolo Porpora constituted an important local school within a growing European tradition of still life painting in the 17th century, much of which can be traced to Caravaggio's earliest influence.

Painting in Naples from Caravaggio to Giordano was on view in London at the Royal Academy from October 2 through December 12, 1982. Co-ordinator in Washington is Sheldon Grossman, curator of Northern and Later Italian Painting at the National Gallery. In consultation with Mr. Grossman, the installation in Washington has been designed by Gaillard Ravenel and Mark Leithauser of the Gallery's Department of Installation and Design.

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION or photographs contact Katherine Warwick, Assistant to the Director (Information Officer), or Marla Price, Information Office, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. 20565, (202) 842-6353.