

THE ART OF PAOLO VERONESE 1528-1588

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, WASHINGTON

November 13, 1988–February 20, 1989

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

THE ART OF PAOLO VERONESE AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY

Washington, DC, August 8, 1988 - A major exhibition of paintings and drawings by Paolo Veronese, including some recently discovered works, will open in the West Building of the National Gallery of Art on November 13, 1988, commemorating the 400th anniversary of the artist's death. For nearly 40 years, Paolo Caliari, known as Veronese, produced works of exquisite beauty which conveyed the splendor of Venice's "Golden Age." The exhibition, which will be seen only at the National Gallery, is made possible by a grant from Ford Motor Company.

The 50 paintings and 55 drawings from many public and private collections in The Art of Paolo Veronese: 1528-1588 will cover every aspect of Veronese's career and illustrate the evolution of his style. Renowned as one of the greatest colorists of all time, Veronese painted works famous for their visual splendor, their luminosity, and the jewel-like opulence of their silvered brocades. As a draftsman, Veronese ranks high in the history of art for the virtuosity, range, and variety of approach of his graphic work.

"Veronese's talent makes him one of the most important artists of the sixteenth century," said J. Carter Brown, director of the National Gallery. "It is with pleasure that we present an exhibition of his work celebrating this glorious aspect of the legacy of Venice," he added.

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Veronese was born in Verona in 1528 and educated in painting there by Antonio Badile, a competent but uninspired local painter. Veronese's talent soon surpassed that of his master and by 1551 he was receiving commissions in Venice. His career was enhanced by successful execution of a number of important ecclesiastical, state, and private commissions for frescoes, painted ceilings, and altarpieces.

Many of Veronese's works are so monumental in scale that they are too large to be included in the show, but in many cases they will be represented by preparatory studies and related canvases. Not for half a century, since the 1939 Veronese exhibition in Venice, has such a comprehensive selection of the artist's work been assembled, and never has there been such a spectacular presentation of it in America.

The Art of Paolo Veronese: 1528-1588 is the final event in a yearlong series of celebratory exhibitions. Three earlier exhibitions in Verona and Venice were smaller in scale and included different selections of works.

One of the revelations of this exhibition will be the recently discovered study for the Palazzo Canossa frescoes entitled Nature Divinities in a Landscape (1545), which is Veronese's earliest known work. Many paintings have been especially restored for this exhibition. "It is wonderful to see the vibrancy and chromatic splendor of so many Veroneses returned in full force," said Beverly Louise Brown, coordinator of the exhibition, and guest curator of southern baroque painting at the National Gallery.

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The Art of Paolo Veronese 1528-1588 will be on view through February 20, 1989. The exhibition will be accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue by W. R. Rearick, professor at the University of Maryland, with an introductory essay by Terisio Pignatti, professor at the University of Venice. It is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION: Please contact Katie Ziglar, National Gallery of Art, (202) 842-6353, or Flo Taussig, Rogers and Cowan, Inc., (202) 466-2925.

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EXHIBITION BACKGROUNDER

The Art of Paolo Veronese 1528 - 1588
National Gallery of Art
November 13, 1988 - February 20, 1989

During the sixteenth century Venice rose to the height of its glory, while the rest of Europe reeled from the ferment of religious, political, and economic upheaval. Chroniclers of the day hailed the city on the lagoon as the wealthiest and most beautiful city in the Western world.

The 1500s also marked the golden age of Venetian painting. From Giorgione to Tintoretto, painters shared a typically Venetian trait: a feeling for the use of color. Paolo Caliari, called Veronese, stood out in this respect and is recognized as one of the greatest colorists of all time. While color was the key to his success, this "prince of the palette" was also renowned for his inventiveness and his virtuosity in drawing. In his ultimate evolution, Veronese achieved a synthesis of color and light, "disegno in colore," where the substance of design is wrought out of color.

Veronese, one of five children, was born in 1528 to a stonecutter named Piero and his wife, Lussia. During Veronese's early adolescence his father placed him in the workshop of Antonio Badile, a competent but uninspired painter working in the traditional mode established by masters such as Mantegna, Bellini, and Giorgione.

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By the age of 20, Veronese began to assert his independence. He assumed the surname Caliari, which may have belonged to a noble patron. (Years later this surname would be replaced by the one with which he entered history: Veronese, after his hometown of Verona.) He also surpassed his teacher and was influenced by Verona's melting pot of artistic currents. Alongside the traditionalists, represented by Veronese's teacher and by Giovanni Francesco Caroto, were young men such as Brusatorzi, Del Moro, Zelotti, and Farinati, who assimilated the maniera, the mannerist approach that flourished in Mantua and Parma. It was in the latter group that the adolescent Veronese began to shape his own artistic language.

While Veronese never fully adhered to the aesthetic of the maniera, traces of it can be seen in the emphatic linear quality and silvery colors of his early works datable to the late 1540s, such as Christ Revives the Daughter of Jairus (no. 2)*.

The controversy between disegno and colore (drawing and color) had an impact on the spread of the maniera as it reached Venice in the 1530s and 1540s. The artistic situation was still not clearly defined by the time Veronese arrived in Venice to seek his fortune in the 1550s.

Writers in Venice were quick to take notice of Veronese's graphic skill, pointing out that it was an essential aspect of an artist whose work they viewed almost as a repudiation of the reigning principle in Venice, color. In 1556 Francisco Sansovino, the first critic to describe the paintings done in 1553 for the Sala del Consiglio dei Dieci in the Palazzo Ducale, wrote, "Paolo is beginning to make himself known as something rare in his profession" and that his work proves "truly

possessed of disegno and delicacy."

Early in his career, Veronese had trained his hand by copying Dürer's engravings and prints, as well as drawings by Parmigianino that he found in Verona. Among his many drawings are lightning-swift first ideas, terse pen sketches to work out compositions and details, and highly finished chiaroscuro drawings, conspicuous in their concise language and broad tonal range. An unusual and important drawing is The Rest on the Flight into Egypt (no. 26) in which Veronese used sharpened chalk in place of pen and ink to obtain a tensile contour, and then made indications of light and shadow with parallel lines and a few well-calculated rubbings with his fingertips.

The paintings from the Sala del Consiglio dei Dieci reveal a sculptural tendency that would prevail in Veronese's stylistic development. The Temptation of Saint Anthony (no. 16), particularly the demon's muscular torso and the powerful foreshortening of the saint, was inspired by the painted figures of Giulio Romano and the sculptures of Michelangelo. The painting also reveals the young artist's adoption of the Romanist style, fostered by an instinctive need for something more classical.

One of Veronese's principal commissions was for the decoration of the church and sacristy of San Sebastiano, a project that would occupy him off and on for nearly two decades. His palette was jubilant and warm, while his subject matter retained the Olympian detachment that goes with mannerist artifice. Veronese also began to integrate painted architecture and illusionistic elements such as flights of stairs in perspective, foreshortened colonnades, temple fronts, and palace facades into his compositions.

Veronese had become the consummate decorative painter. The older master Titian recognized Veronese's talent and awarded him the prized gold chain as the best of seven painters who had decorated the Libreria Marciana early in 1553. Around 1559-1560, Veronese was commissioned to fresco a villa in the hills at Maser built by the architect Andrea Palladio and owned by the Barbaro brothers, who were known for their wealth and culture. This work, which included idyllic landscapes extending the architecture of the rooms and allegorical paintings alluding to the Barbaro family's destiny, marked a critical point in Veronese's career. He was able to give pictorial form to the ideology of his patrons' program without surrendering the gains of his own personal artistic development. Six drawings (nos. 32-39) thought to be studies for the Villa Barbaro frescoes are included in the exhibition.

By this time Veronese was inundated with commissions. With the help of a workshop, which included his brother, his nephew, and later two of his sons, he was able to meet the high demand for his work, which included portraits and paintings for foreign courts.

Banquet themes dominated his work in the 1560s and 1570s. He used a full range of color in his large paintings of religious festivities and court functions. In the grandiose scenes set amid classical architecture, he exulted the wealth and power of Venice achieving its golden age. Even on a small scale this can be seen in his richly colored and elaborate drawing Allegory of the Holy League (no. 53).

Seductive images and profane themes in paintings such as Venus and Mars Surprised by Cupid (no. 38) and Venus and Cupid with a Mirror (no. 87) were evident in Veronese's palette into the 1580s. In 1573 he was summoned before the Inquisition to justify his inclusion of "buffoons, drunkards, Germans, dwarfs and other such scurrilities" in the painting

originally executed as a Last Supper. Veronese's defense of poetic license was denounced as heretical and he was ordered to correct his "mistakes" at his own expense. In the end, he merely changed the title to Feast in the House of Levi. Despite the uproar, Veronese's paintings such as Dream of Saint Helen (no. 71) reflect the spiritual awareness that was an integral part of Venetian life.

The death in 1579 of Veronese's third son, Camillo, who lived only 28 days, and an awareness of his own mortality may have been responsible for the predominance of death in his late religious paintings. After decades of painting without the slightest concern for the tragic implications of his religious subjects, Veronese learned to feel for their humanity. He strove for emotional expression free of academic restraint. In contrast to his reputation as a decorative painter, Veronese expressed a spiritual violence in paintings such as The Martyrdom and Last Communion of Saint Lucy (no. 97).

In the Miracle of Saint Pantaleon (no. 103), Veronese approached a baroque style through his striking synthesis of light and color, which perfectly communicates the wide range of emotions of the saint who discovers his power to heal, and in it the cause of his own martyrdom.

Before Veronese died in April 1588 from "chest pain and fever," he had reached the heights of pictorial expression and opened the way to a new phase of painting in Venice.

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* - Catalogue numbers in parentheses are included for pieces in the exhibition.