

## **CARAVAGGIO'S FRIENDS & FOES**

26 MAY - 23 JULY 2010

**WHITFIELD FINE ART / FIRST FLOOR / 23 DERING STREET  
LONDON W1S1AW / +44 20 7355 0040 / whitfieldfineart.com**

2010 is the 400th anniversary of the death of the painter Caravaggio, who died at Porto Ercole in July 1610. Whitfield Fine Art will mark this anniversary with a major exhibition, during summer of 2010, of important paintings by Caravaggio's early Seventeenth century contemporaries and followers, with the aim of understanding him through the artists that reacted to this controversial personality.

The exhibition will feature works by Caravaggio's good friends Prospero Orsi and Louis Finson; his great rivals Tommaso Salini and Giovanni Baglione; the painters Antiveduto Gramatica and Cavalier d'Arpino whose studios he worked in when he first arrived in Rome; and his close followers Lo Spadarino, Jusepe de Ribera, Orazio Gentileschi, Simon Vouet and others.

A major role in the show is given to the Bruges painter Louis Finson, who must have known Caravaggio in Rome, but for a longer period in Naples, where he acquired a number of works by the master - including the famous *Madonna of the Rosary* in Vienna and the *Crucifixion of St Andrew* in Cleveland. Finson is a figure of primary importance in Caravaggesque painting although his contribution has often been overlooked. The three masterpieces by Finson that will be presented in this exhibition will aim to show him in a new light and present this exact contemporary of Caravaggio as an important painter in his own right.

Other artists were as close, Prospero Orsi came from the ranks of the decorative artists who belonged to what was effectively the artisans guild. Orsi, who understood the sensational nature of Caravaggio's creations, helped promote him by advertising his new-found ability among his existing patrons and indeed those of his brother - the Latin tutor to the future Pope. Orsi never seems to have fully grasped the naturalism of Caravaggio's revolutionary technique but nonetheless he would continue to exploit his familiarity with the painter, providing copies of the celebrated designs, even after the latter left Rome, and painting still-lives that came to be identified with works by the master himself. These works are exhibited under Orsi's name for the first time.

During his short career, the success Caravaggio achieved was bound to provoke envy, and of that there was plenty. His employer, the most successful painter of his generation, Cavalier d'Arpino, regarded the young man as an upstart. Caravaggio was said to have painted a picture with a devil sticking his tongue out at Cavalier d'Arpino's frescoes in San Lorenzo in Damaso. Giovanni Baglione, who was later to be Caravaggio's first biographer, said he was libeled by the Caravaggio and his friends, and insulted by his slighting remarks - this was the subject of a famous trial in 1603. Tommaso Salini, one of those who took part in the trial, was regarded by Caravaggio as a mortal enemy - for he was credited with the invention of the genre of still-lives for which Caravaggio became famous. All three of these artists will be represented in the exhibition.

Orazio Gentileschi is documented as loaning Caravaggio props for his paintings - a Franciscan monk's habit for his pictures of *St Francis*, and a pair of wings that he used for angels. Ottavio Leoni was a personal friend, who came as close as anyone to his technique of optical reproduction, which was the basis of his profession as a portraitist. Antiveduto Gramatica started his career doing the same kind of portrait copies that Caravaggio undertook, and then turned towards a more studied naturalism, as he reached the peak of his profession as Principe of the painters' Academy.

Many were those who tried to understand how Caravaggio did his work, like Guido Reni who is documented as buying Caravaggio's pictures in order to piece together the magic that he employed. In Rome Jusepe de Ribera arrived too late to know the man himself, but tried the tricks that he heard Caravaggio used in his studio - such as knocking through a skylight to produce a direct lighting system - and subjects from the streets of Rome, gipsies and courtesans. The French painter Simon Vouet too arrived at this moment, when various patrons like Mancini tried to replicate the great originals, and developed a system using artificial light to imitate the chiaroscuro that everyone saw as a hallmark of his style. Many other artists also tried to emulate the effects they saw, and two paintings will be on show by the Master of the De Vito Liberation of St Peter, a work once thought to be by Caravaggio himself, but now contested between a French and Neapolitan attribution.

This will be an unmissable exhibition that will give a different slant to the idea of Caravaggism, which so often is a smorgasbord of a vast range of talent that responded to the streak of the artist's independence rather than his inventions themselves. It will aim to show lesser known artists

PRESS RELEASE - WHITFIELD FINE ART

such as Finson, Orsi and Salini as more able and interesting painters than the shadow of Caravaggio's art has allowed them to be.

NOTES TO EDITORS

Established in 1979 Whitfield Fine Art is one of the leading Old Master galleries in the world. After twenty years on New Bond Street we have moved to a new gallery on Dering street. We are specialists in Italian pictures, yet the gallery's stock is representative of painting throughout Western Europe. We have successfully negotiated on behalf of our clients to museums and private collectors, and have sold to many of the great museums of the world including: National Gallery, London; Museo del Prado, Madrid; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; J. Paul Getty Museum, Malibu; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Pinacoteca Nazionale di Bologna; Cleveland Museum of Art; Indianapolis Museum of Art; Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna; Blanton Museum of Art, Houston; Kunsthhaus, Zurich; The Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Antwerp and the National Museum of Western Art, Tokyo among many others.

MICHELANGELO MERISI called CARAVAGGIO (29 September 1571–18 July 1610) was an Italian artist active in Rome, Naples, Malta and Sicily between 1593 and 1610. His intensely emotional realism and dramatic use of lighting (*chiaroscuro*) had a formative influence on the Baroque school of painting.

CARAVAGGISM refers to those Baroque artists, all distinctly influenced by the art of Caravaggio. The Caravaggisti practiced in Rome, Naples and the North particularly in the quarter century after Caravaggio's death.

For more information and photographic materials please contact Edward Clark / [ed@whitfieldfineart.com](mailto:ed@whitfieldfineart.com) / +44 20 7355 0040