CARAVAGGIO: PERCEPTION SHIFTS THROUGH SELECTED TWENTIETH- AND TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY MUSEUM EXHIBITIONS

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this thesis will be the exploration of the narrative constructs around the life and work of Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1571–1610). This exploration will occur through the study of selected exhibitions curated on the Lombard artist from the twentieth- through twenty-first centuries. It will demonstrate how museums have played a significant role in the public’s understanding and perception of Caravaggio. In this thesis, I will argue that exhibitions on Caravaggio have supported and reshaped the general understanding and perception of the artist in crucial ways not done to the same effect in more nuanced academic scholarship. I will also argue that public exhibitions have functioned according to a different set of agendas from those addressed to academia. For example, exhibitions are conceived and function on guiding principles such as alignment with museum mission statements, audience draw and accessibility, educational outcomes, and the visitor experience. This thesis will seek to determine to what measure these principles have affected the framing of content and to clarify how in particular the selective use of Caravaggio’s biography has affected interpretation of his works within a museum context for a viewing public.

The restored enthusiasm for Caravaggio in the second-half of the twentieth century also focused on his personal life due to the publication and translation by Walter Friedlaender of Lives written by his seventeenth-century biographers—Giorgio Mancini, Giovanni Baglione, and Giovanni Pietro Bellori—as well as the publication of documents and court records, which highlighted episodes of Caravaggio’s criminality, all impinging on our interpretation of his artistic merits. Although these findings support our understanding of Caravaggio as a complex individual, they also contribute to the
sensationalization and romanticization of the artist as the quintessentially bohemian figure. Furthermore, doubtful attributions and disputes over execution dates problematize our understanding of the artist’s oeuvre and have at certain points reinforced a ‘Caravaggio narrative’ of the rebellious, indecorous artist. It is my intention to show how museum exhibitions have contributed to and exploited this narrative and to determine more precisely how and to what extent they have shaped it. With this exploration of Caravaggio’s narrative construction by museum exhibitions of the twentieth- to twenty-first centuries, I aim to approach and reconsider this subject, which has been dealt with heavily in scholarship, under a different lens. In the case of Caravaggio—whose persona and works have been posthumously manipulated, admired, and condemned at the hands of biographers and critics—it is necessary to approach this subject with renewed, unbiased, and objective vigor within a new frame of understanding: the museum exhibition frame.

I will use a comparative method, studying three key exhibitions over time, to show how museums have presented the artist’s career development. I pay particular attention to the incorporation of biography and to the impact the inclusion of selected aspects of his Lives have had on the public view of his works. The influential format of Giorgio Vasari’s Lives of the Artists set the structure and codified the model of biographical determinism that would inform Caravaggio’s later biographers in the interpretation of his works; this has persisted through the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries with the application of psychoanalytic approaches to Caravaggio. The first of the three exhibitions I have selected is Longhi’s 1951 Milan exhibition, Mostra del Caravaggio e dei Caravagggeschi, which restored public
consciousness of Caravaggio’s innovative and revolutionary style, reinserting him into the artistic canon. My second example will be *The Age of Caravaggio*, held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1985. The Met exhibition is novel for its focus on Caravaggio’s relationship with his precursors and contemporaries (the organizing committee deliberately excluded works by Caravaggio’s followers) and for its interpretation of works within their historical context. Finally, I will examine *Caravaggio: L’ultimo tempo 1606–1610*, held first at the Museo di Capodimonte, Naples 2004–2005, then later as *Caravaggio: The Final Years*, at the National Gallery, London in 2005, which focused on the more enigmatic part of Caravaggio’s late career after his flight from Rome in 1606. The London 2005 exhibition provided new insight into the artist’s stylistic changes in the last years of his life. These three exhibitions will give insight about the perception shifts of the artist that have taken place in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries as a result of scholarly research spurred by museum exhibitions centered around Caravaggio.
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The focus of this thesis is the exploration of shifts of perception in the life and work of Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1571–1610) through the study of selected exhibitions curated on the Lombard artist from the twentieth- and early twenty-first centuries. The thesis will demonstrate how museums have played a significant role in the public’s notion of Caravaggio.

In this thesis, I argue that exhibitions on Caravaggio have supported and reshaped the general understanding and perception of the artist in crucial ways not done to the same effect in more nuanced academic scholarship. I also argue that public exhibitions have functioned according to a different set of agendas from those addressed to academia. For example, exhibitions are conceived of and function on guiding principles, such as alignment with museum mission statements, audience draw and accessibility, educational outcomes, and visitor experience. This thesis determined to what measure these principles have affected the framing of content and clarified how in particular the selective use of Caravaggio’s biography has affected interpretation of his works within a museum context for a viewing public.

The groundbreaking 1951 exhibition, Mostra del Caravaggio e dei Caravaggeschi, which brought Caravaggio back into the limelight of both scholarly and public interest, provides a starting point for the thesis.¹ This landmark exhibition revived public and scholarly interest after more than three hundred years of disregard for the Lombard artist; it amassed the largest group of Caravaggio works under one roof for the

¹Palazzo Reale di Milano and Roberto Longhi, Mostra del Caravaggio e dei Caravaggeschi; catalogo, aprile-giugno, 1951, Palazzo reale (Milan, Italy: Sansoni, 1951).
first time ever. The restored enthusiasm for Caravaggio in the second-half of the twentieth century (greatly a result of this exhibition) also focused on his personal life due to the publication and translation by Walter Friedlaender of Lives written by his seventeenth-century biographers—Giulio Mancini, Giovanni Baglione, and Giovanni Pietro Bellori—as well as the publication of documents and court records that highlighted episodes of Caravaggio’s criminality, impinging on our interpretation of his artistic merits. Although these findings support our understanding of Caravaggio as a complex individual, they also contribute to the sensationalization and romanticization of the artist as the quintessentially bohemian figure. Furthermore, doubtful attributions and disputes over execution dates problematize our understanding of the artist’s oeuvre and have, at certain points, reinforced a “Caravaggio narrative” of the rebellious, and deeply troubled artist, show how museum exhibitions may have shaped this narrative and determine more precisely how and to what extent. With this exploration of Caravaggio’s perception shifts by museum exhibitions of the twentieth- to twenty-first centuries, I aimed to approach and reconsider this subject under a different lens. In my view, scholars are responsible for looking back and gaining awareness, identifying and rectifying biases in inherited lines of thought, and seeking objectivity in our interpretations and accounts. In the case of Caravaggio—whose persona and works have been posthumously manipulated, admired, and condemned at the hands of biographers and critics—this subject should be approached with renewed, unbiased, and objective vigor within a new frame of

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2Walter F. Friedlaender, Caravaggio Studies (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1955). Friedlaender includes complete transcriptions of Caravaggio’s seventeenth-century biographies by Baglione, Bellori, Mancini, van Mander, and Sandrart, in addition to documents pertaining to the artist’s life and work. Friedlaender’s compilation of contemporary reports contextualizes the reception and interpretation of the artist’s works. This book was the first instance in which these texts and translations were jointly published, and it contributed greatly to the study of Caravaggio using original sources.
understanding: the museum exhibition frame. The restored enthusiasm for the Lombard master since the 1950s is largely the result of a museum exhibition; before proceeding to understand and explore this subject from this angle, awareness of the existence of museum agendas must be considered.

**Approach And Method**

I used a comparative method, studying three key exhibitions to show how museums have presented the artist’s career development. Particular attention was paid to the incorporation of biography and to the effect that the inclusion of selected aspects of his *Lives* have had on the public view of his works. The influential format of Giorgio Vasari’s *Lives of the Artists* set the structure and codified the model of biographical determinism that informed Caravaggio’s later biographers in the interpretation of his works; this has persisted through the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries with the application of psychoanalytical approaches to Caravaggio (discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3).³

The first of the three exhibitions selected was Longhi’s 1951 Milan exhibition, because it reintroduced Caravaggio to the public after centuries of neglect. This exhibition restored public consciousness of Caravaggio’s innovative and revolutionary

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³Giorgio Vasari, *Vite de’ più eccellenti pittori scultori e architetti da Cimabue insino a’ tempi nostri* (Florence, Italy: Torrentino, 1550). This authoritative text established the biographical format that subsequent art historical writings followed, namely those who wrote on Caravaggio—Giovanni Baglione, Pietro Bellori, Giulio Mancini, Karel van Mander, and Joachim von Sandrart—all adhering to Vasari’s model (see in Friedlaender, *Caravaggio Studies*, 1955). In the twenty-first century, John E. Gedo used biographical data to make psychoanalytical assessments to provide insight into Caravaggio’s psychological drives. Gedo described his psychoanalytical approach in John E. Gedo, *Portraits of the Artist: Psychoanalysis of Creativity and Its Vicissitudes* (New York: Guilford Press, 1983), 161–193.
style, reinserting him into the artistic canon. The second example was *The Age of Caravaggio*, held at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1985. The New York exhibition was novel for its focus on Caravaggio’s relationship with his precursors and contemporaries (the organizing committee deliberately excluded works by Caravaggio’s followers) and for its interpretation of works within their historical context. The final selection examined *Caravaggio: L’ultimo tempo 1606–1610*, held first at the Museo di Capodimonte, Naples 2004–2005, then later as *Caravaggio: The Final Years*, at the National Gallery, London, in 2005. This exhibit focused on the more enigmatic part of Caravaggio’s late career after his flight from Rome in 1606 and provided new insight into the artist’s stylistic changes in the last years of his life. Sheila McTighe commented that both the Italian and English versions of the exhibition were quite inconclusive regarding dating and attribution questions and that interpretive questions regarding the artist’s works were not being asked. Yet what this exhibition clearly challenged was the notion that the quality of Caravaggio’s art declined due to the hastiness that characterized the last years of his life as he moved from city to city. The span of more than fifty years from Longhi’s Milan exhibition to the Capodimonte exhibition allowed for analysis of changing attitudes and trends in scholarship regarding the artist and the interpretation of

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4Roberto Longhi, *Mostra del Caravaggio e dei Caravaggeschi*.


his works, particularly the study of the methodologies used by exhibition organizers and how they handled new findings and research. Since Caravaggio: L’ultimo tempo 1606–1610, there has not been a substantial perception shift that invites a reevaluation of Caravaggio and his works. For this reason, it was selected as an ending point for this thesis; although subsequent exhibitions continue to expand upon the much-explored topics of connoisseurship, his artistic peers and followers, and his life and legacy.

First I examined the way in which museum exhibitions (beginning with Longhi’s 1951 show) represented Caravaggio’s works and constructed his narrative by undertaking a case study of their successive interpretations of the painting of David with the Head of Goliath (Figure 1) at the Galleria Borghese in Rome, identified as a self-portrait of the artist from the earliest accounts of the painting by Jacomo Manilli and Bellori.9 This work has been given wide-ranging and controversial dates of execution and is believed by some scholars to have been painted as an act of contrition for the murder of an adversary, Ranuccio Tomassoni, identified as a procurer from Terni.10 Scholars fall into divergent camps: some believe David with the Head of Goliath dates to 1605–1606, late


10Andrew Graham-Dixon, Caravaggio: A Life Sacred and Profane (New York, NY: W.W. Norton, 2012), 178–181. Tomassoni came from a family of soldiers and mercenaries and ran a brothel in Rome; he managed and was likely romantically involved with Fillide Melandroni, a prostitute who modeled for and was painted by Caravaggio numerous times. This was a major point of contention and what possibly originated Tomassoni’s and Caravaggio’s enmity; resulting in the former’s murder by the painter during a duel disguised as a tennis match on May 28, 1606.
in his Roman period; others place it at the end of the artist’s life, in 1610.\(^{11}\) This painting is significant as a case study, because it exemplifies the problem of using modern frames of understanding for interpretation and date determination. The artist’s self-insertion has been taken by some scholars as an expression of remorse for his homicidal transgression. For example, David Stone thinks the *David* was executed in the last months of the Roman period or shortly after the murder of Tomassoni in the summer of 1606. Scholars who are proponents of this earlier date also pose stylistic comparisons to paintings executed during that time as a visual source of evidence for their claims. After venturing into speculations that it could date to 1609, a consensus has required a return to the earlier date of 1605–1606 despite romantic readings of Caravaggio’s auto-mimesis; these readings associate the artist’s self-identification with decapitation as being symptomatic of his self-destructive personality and castration complex.\(^{12}\)

A central aspect of this thesis was to use this case study to gain a clearer understanding of how Caravaggio exhibitions engage in this controversy, by either calling the legitimacy of certain methodologies into question or by substantiating them. The narrative of the bohemian, rebellious, criminal artist has greatly affected our perception of the artist’s works. It can be said that, in the case of *David with the Head of Goliath*, works have been used as a means of approximation to the artist’s psychology

\(^{11}\)Scholars who claim a later date of execution for this painting, such as Herwath Röttgen, Laurie Schneider, Howard Hibbard and John E. Gedo, are proponents of psychoanalytic interpretations; this is discussed by David M. Stone in his essay “Self and Myth in Caravaggio’s David and Goliath,” in Genevieve Warwick, *Caravaggio: Realism, Rebellion, Reception* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2006), 38.

\(^{12}\)Stone “Self and Myth in Caravaggio’s David and Goliath,” 38. Stone supports the earlier date of 1605–1606. Stone views the artist’s automimesis as Goliath as a “carefully planned act of self-fashioning,” where Caravaggio was “in control of the discourse,” rather than a psychoanalytic expression of self-identification. Other scholars who agree that the painting was executed in the last months of the Roman period are Keith Christiansen and Gianni Papi.
and internal persona. Paintings have served as supplements to the preconceived notion or narrative in the mind of the viewer. It is crucial to identify whether museum exhibitions have either perpetuated or subdued the Caravaggio narrative. Conversely, museum exhibition spaces offer the opportunity of confrontation with Caravaggio’s works and thus allow for an object-based experience that can refocus attention and awareness to the works themselves and away from sensationalism.

The reading of Caravaggio’s paintings through a psychoanalytical lens has been problematic and has led some scholars to place greater emphasis on the turmoil of the events of the artist’s personal life than on the analysis of his oeuvre. This dominating biographical view, however, originated early, with the artist’s near-contemporary biographers, namely Bellori, who wrote that:

Caravaggio’s style corresponded to his physiognomy and appearance; he had a dark complexion and dark eyes, and his eyebrows and hair were black; this colouring was naturally reflected in his paintings . . . driven by his own nature, he retreated to the dark style that is connected to his disturbed and contentious temperament.¹³

Bellori believed that Caravaggio’s dark manner paralleled his shadowy and coarse exterior, which he saw as a direct consequence of his character. Bellori stated that Caravaggio’s early style was sweet, pure, and “his best” and contrasted it with the stylistic turn he took in his later career,

. . . but then he shifted to that other dark style, attracted to it by his own temperament, just as he was troubled and quarrelsome in his conduct as well. First, he had to leave Milan and his native land because of it; later he

was forced to flee from Rome and from Malta, to go about Sicily in hiding, to live in danger in Naples, and to die wretchedly on a beach.¹⁴

This drama-infused reductive synopsis of the artist’s life set a strong precedent in subsequent biographies, in scholarship, and in the general understanding and interpretation of the artist’s works—a marriage of life and art that scholar and exhibition attendee alike are confronted with when viewing a painting by Caravaggio. This is especially problematic when considering questions of dating and attribution; the life of the artist tempts and sways us to read onto the canvas and see expressions of emotional and psychological entrails. My contention is that Bellori’s comments set the stage and valorized the later adoption of a psychological reading of the artist, his works, and career. I explored how the exhibition has been determinative in this narrative construction.¹⁵

This thesis explored the light in which the developing scholarship on the artist after 1951, presented in the public platform of the exhibition, has been crucial to the development of perception of the artist in modern times. I considered the following:

1. The new findings that have reshaped our interpretation of the artist’s works;
2. How the chronological placement of *David with the Head of Goliath* toward the end of his life does or does not support a narrative of the “tormented artist”; and
3. How exhibitions have been curated and laid out, whether chronologically or thematically; and


4. Whether exhibitions have directly addressed the controversy of doubtful attributions and dates of execution or have forgone this controversy in favor of a romanticized and linear narrative.

The exhibition space is where popular reception and scholarly conception converge. This convergence results in a discourse that informs both museum audiences and scholars alike. It is my aim to deconstruct and analyze it.

**Research And Chapter Organization**

The research material I used for this study consisted primarily of exhibition catalogues and reviews, focusing on the period from 1951 to 2005.\(^\text{16}\) I analyzed and discussed this range of exhibitions, in addition to scholarship about the artist and his works. Each of the selected exhibitions denotes a phase in the development of Caravaggio studies, succinctly stated in the title of my chapters. This thesis addressed the following: (a) how these particular exhibitions have supported and shaped our understanding of the artist, (b) the resulting controversy of dates and attributions, and (c) the agendas of these three selected exhibitions. This study contributes to a better understanding about how Caravaggio scholarship has been organized and conveyed to an audience in a museum setting and the reception thereof. It yields a better understanding of how museum exhibitions compress scholarship to construct an image of an artist and to what extent exhibitions substantiate the discourse or extend and question it. I endeavored to demonstrate how museum exhibitions work as agents to convey content to

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\(^{16}\)This date range encompasses the three selected exhibitions that are discussed in this thesis, they exemplify the leading perception shifts in Caravaggio studies. Subsequent exhibitions continue to explore the topic of connoisseurship, his artistic peers and followers, and his life and legacy.
audiences and how they confirm or re-evaluate the existing Caravaggio scholarship. Finally, Appendix A provides a brief timeline of Caravaggio exhibitions and Appendix B provides a list of figures discussed throughout the thesis.¹⁷

¹⁷See Appendix A for a chronological timeline of all Caravaggio-focused exhibitions.
CHAPTER 1
MOSTRA DEL CARAVAGGIO E DEI CARAVAGGESCHI: RESTORATION TO THE CANON

If there is one individual widely credited with the comeback of Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1571–1610) in the twentieth century, it is Roberto Longhi (1890–1970). The foremost scholar of the Lombard master, became the master himself of Caravaggio historiography. As briefly described above, Longhi’s research efforts culminated with the 1951 exhibition titled, *Mostra del Caravaggio e dei Caravaggeschi* at the Palazzo Reale in Milan, Italy.18 Caravaggio’s *risorgimento* was no single effort, however, but a combined effort that began more than forty years before Longhi’s groundbreaking *Mostra*.

Wolfgang Kallab (1875–1906) was the first scholar to resurrect Caravaggio in his study of the *seicento* painter after almost three centuries of neglect.19 Although Kallab’s untimely death impeded him from completing his piece on Caravaggio, those fragments were published posthumously. Kallab already recognized Caravaggio’s far-reaching influence; most remarkably, he perceived that the weight of artistic impact on other greats—such as Rubens and Rembrandt—did not correspond to the respect and importance attributed to him. As such, Kallab opened the space for a re-evaluation of the artist.20

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19Wolfgang Kallab, “Caravaggio,” *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorisches Sammlung der Allerhöchsten Kaiserhaus*, 26 (1906), 272–292. Kallab’s fragments are published in this piece, his interest was directed to the periods of Mannerism and the Baroque. Thus, he began with the fundamental treatment of Caravaggio.
20Kallab, “Caravaggio,” 272. “Daß er einer der einflußreichsten Künstler des XVI. Jahrhunderts war, konnte auch von klassizistich gestimten Beurteilern nicht in Abrede gestellt werden; die Wirkung, die
A series of articles written by Lionello Venturi (1885–1961) in *L’Arte* (1909–1910) on the subject of Caravaggio followed. A decade later, Venturi published his findings in a book titled, *Il Caravaggio*. Venturi’s publications in conjunction with the *Mostra della pittura Italiana del Seicento e del Settecento* of 1922 at the Pitti Palace in Florence were the beginnings of a period of burgeoning research on the Lombard naturalist. Venturi states that

seine Arbeiten ausgeübt haben, ist weder zeitlich noch lokal begrenzt; abgesehen von einer Unzahl von Nachahmern aller Nationen, haben sich Künstler wie Rubens und Guido Reni an ihm gebildet; Rembrandt steht mittelbar unter seiner Einwirkung, deren Spuren bis in die moderne französische Malerei zu verfolgen sind. Trotzdem entspricht die Kenntnis von dem Werdegange und der Tätigkeit dieses Malers weder der Achtung, die man ihm zollt, noch der Bedeutung, die man ihm zuschreibt.” That he was one of the most influential artists of the sixteenth century was not to be disputed, his work is neither temporally nor locally limited; apart from an immense number of imitators, artists like Rubens and Guido Reni have formed in it; Rembrandt stands indirectly under his influence, whose work can be traced to modern French painting. Still, the knowledge of the artist's progress and the activity of this painter does not correspond to the respect nor the importance attributed to him.


23 Palazzo Pitti, *Mostra della pittura Italiana del Seicento e del Settecento* (Rome, Italy: Bestetti e Tumminelli, 1922), was held in Florence. According to Friedlaender, *The Art Bulletin* 35, no. 4 (1953): 315, in his review of Venturi’s and Longhi’s monographs, he explained that this exhibition “opened way for a deeper understanding of the artist’s work by permitting for the first time a thorough examination of the canvases devoted to St. Matthew, which had been almost invisible in the darkness of the Contarelli Chapel in S. Luigi dei Francesi.” Although Longhi’s exhibition was the first in which Caravaggio had center stage, thirty years earlier, the Pitti Palace *Mostra*, featured the Lombard as protagonist in Italian painting of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. There were sixteen Caravaggio paintings and seven more attributed to him in addition to paintings by followers. Pages 49–52 of the catalogue lists the paintings:

Sixteen Caravaggio paintings displayed:

- *Death of the Virgin*, the Louvre, Paris
- *Amor vincit omnia*, Gemaldegalerie, Berlin
- *Sleeping Cupid*, Galleria Palatina, Florence
- *Saint Matthew and the Angel*, San Luigi dei Francesi, Rome
- *The calling of St. Matthew*, San Luigi dei Francesi, Rome
- *The Martyrdom of St. Matthew*, San Luigi dei Francesi, Rome
- *Supper in Emmaus*, Pinacoteca di Brera (Reportedly acquired by Ottavio Costa, Rome; Marchese Costanzo Patrizi, Rome by 1624; Purchased by Amici di Brera 1939 from Marchese Patrizio Patrizi, Rome).
- *David with the Head of Goliath*, Galleria Borghese, Roma
- *Madonna and Child with St. Anne (Dei Palafrenieri)*, Galleria Borghese, Roma
- *St. Jerome Writing*, Galleria Borghese, Rome
- *Narcissus*, Galleria Nazionale d’Arte Antica, Rome
- *Madonna di Loreto*, Chiesa di Sant’Agostino, Rome
- *The Conversion of St. Paul*, S. Maria del Popolo, Rome
the Milan exhibition was the place where those ideas, expressed in his book, concluded a
phase of research that began forty-two years prior.\textsuperscript{24}

The \textit{Mostra del Seicento} was significant in that it highlighted Caravaggio’s St.
Matthew cycle for the first time. Walter Friedlaender commented that this
opened way for a deeper understanding of the artist’s work by permitting
for the first time a thorough examination of the canvases devoted to St.
Matthew, which had been almost invisible in the darkness of the Contarelli
Chapel in S. Luigi dei Francesi.\textsuperscript{25}

The very paintings that brought Caravaggio fame and wide recognition in Rome for the
first time in 1600 were casting a renewed spotlight on him once again, more than three
hundred years later. The \textit{Mostra del Seicento} was the first step in collective
acknowledgment of Caravaggio’s significance and contribution to Italian art of the
sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. At this point, when his locus in the continuum of
Italian art was conferred with Longhi’s single-artist Milan \textit{Mostra}, Caravaggio’s canonic
status was confirmed.

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textit{The Martyrdom of St. Peter}, S. Maria del Popolo, Rome
  \item \textit{St. Francis in Meditation}, Chiesa dei Capuccini, Rome
  \item \textit{Testa di Medusa}, Uffizzi Gallery, Florence
\end{itemize}

Paintings attributed to Caravaggio that were displayed:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textit{Bacchus}, Uffizzi Gallery, Florence
  \item \textit{The Lute Player}, Pinacoteca di Torino
  \item \textit{The Taking of Christ}, National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin
  \item \textit{David with the Head of Goliath}
  \item \textit{Virgin and Saint Anne}, Galleria Spada, Rome
  \item \textit{Saint John the Baptist}, Basel Öffentliche Kunstsammlung
  \item \textit{The Incredulity of St. Thomas}, Certosa di San Martino, Napoli
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{24}\textit{Venturi, Il Caravaggio}, 1. “La Mostra del Caravaggio a Milano è stata il luogo ove le idee qui esposte si sono
determinate come conclusione di una ricerca storica e di una tensione critica iniziate quarantadue anni fa.”

\textsuperscript{25}\textit{Friedlaender, Caravaggio Studies}, 315, explains the significance of St. Matthew cycles at \textit{Mostra del Seicento}. 
Before delving into the merits of Longhi’s 1951 exhibition, it is first necessary to arrive at that point by examining the constituents that laid the groundwork for his interest in Caravaggio and his followers in his early career. As a twenty-one-year-old budding scholar in 1911, Longhi presented his dissertation on Caravaggio at the University of Turin, where he studied under Pietro Toesca. Thereafter, Longhi made his way to Rome to teach art history at the licei while attending the School of Advanced Studies under Adolfo Venturi, Lionello Venturi’s father. Soon after, Longhi became a contributor to periodicals La Voce and L’Arte, the latter of which was founded by Venturi, who put him in charge of book reviews. Longhi’s next stride in Caravaggio research was his studies on Borgianni, Caracciolo, and the Gentileschi, which appeared in L’Arte between 1914–1916. Next came Quesiti Caravaggeschi, in which he backdated the birth of Caravaggio from 1573 to 1571 and corrected dates of the artist’s apprenticeship under Simone Peterzano in Milan; Longhi also further explored Caravaggio’s artistic precedents in Lombardy. In subsequent publications, such as “Ultimi studi su Caravaggio” (1943), Longhi established the artist’s oeuvre and examined the painter’s artistic provenance, underscoring what Friedlaender characterized as the “blood-and-soil heritage of Lombard realism.” The remarkable exhibition in Milan, held under Longhi’s auspices, was the thus the fruit of forty years of research.

30 Friedlaender, “Caravaggio by Lionello Venturi.”
The *Mostra del Caravaggio*, which ran from April to June of 1951, was significant as the first exhibition to be devoted to the naturalist painter inasmuch for the richness and sheer quantity of works displayed. The exhibition brought together the largest group of works by or attributed to Caravaggio that has ever been assembled.31 There were 189 paintings in three categories: *precaravaggeschi* (the artistic antecedents), Caravaggio (his *oeuvre*), and *caravaggeschi* (his followers). The numerical breakdown is as follows: 4 works by *precaravaggeschi*, 44 works by Caravaggio, 7 attributions, 10 copies, and 124 paintings by *caravaggeschi*, in Italy and beyond. The works were organized chronologically, starting with paintings by the *precaravaggeschi*, Antonio and Vincenzo Campi and Simone Peterzano, works by Caravaggio, and finally works by the *caravaggeschi*—testaments to Caravaggio’s artistic legacy. The last category is nuanced, as several of the artists categorized as *caravaggeschi* were Caravaggio’s peers—Baglione, Rubens, Borgianni, Gentileschi, Saraceni, Caracciolo; the remaining *caravaggeschi* participated in the Caravagesque phenomenon after his death. The progressive unfolding of works revealed the artistic beginnings and brewing of a strong artistic force that indubitably altered the immediate and eventual artistic output of the seventeenth century.

Longhi clearly stipulated an agenda—his three goals for the exhibition were:

- First, to honor Caravaggio and show how his works inspired, impacted, and had a lasting influence on the development of European art.

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31These works included the *Bacchus* (Florence, Uffizi) to his then last known work *Nativity with St. Francis and St. Lawrence* (Palermo, Oratorio di San Lorenzo) as described by Longhi in *Mostra del Caravaggio* catalogo, b.
• Second, to gather the works in a space that offered scholars an opportunity to study them side by side, one that likely would not repeat itself due to the quality and quantity of works amassed.

• Third, to bring together and enliven Caravaggio’s collective spirit, for it to be better understood and admired; for it was through his vaunted realism that he revealed a profound humanity.\textsuperscript{32}

Longhi opened the catalogue introduction by asking the viewer to imagine what a Caravaggio exhibition would have been like a century ago. He continued, “è certo che l’interesse più forte si sarebbe appuntato sul carattere impetuoso dell’uomo, sui suoi misfatti e, quanto alle opere, per induzione, sui loro aspetti più torvi.”\textsuperscript{33} In other words, according to Longhi, this hypothetical exhibition would have been focused on Caravaggio’s impetuous character, his criminal and artistic offenses, and the grimmest aspects of his works. Longhi was aware of the shadow that followed Caravaggio—the shadow of his peccati, or sins, his dark persona and his vita, cast by the animadversions of his biographer-critics. The sensationalism, induced by Caravaggio’s most troubling transgression of murder, is confronted and quelled by Longhi’s admittance to it as an intrinsic facet of the Caravaggesque allure. Yet Longhi refocuses our attention where it is pertinent—to Caravaggio’s opere, his works.

\textsuperscript{32}Longhi, \textit{Mostra del Caravaggio e dei Caravaggeschi}, b. “La odierna Mostra Milanese […] si propone tre scopi: onorare il grande Lombardo, e documentare che la sua arte ebbe larga efficacia ispiratrice e influì durevolmente sullo sviluppo dell’arte europea; offrire agli studiosi raccolto un complesso di opera che per numero e qualita’ non sara’ dato facilmente di rivedere; infine accostare l’anima collettiva alla comprensione e all’ammirazione di questo singolare Maestro che, nel vantato realismo, svela un cosi’ profondo palpito umano.”

\textsuperscript{33}Longhi, \textit{Mostra del Caravaggio e dei Caravaggeschi}, b.
Longhi did not entertain the polemical aspects of Caravaggio’s life in the interpretation of his works. For Longhi, Caravaggio’s criminality was not central to the development of his art but rather one of the many facets of his complex humanity. Longhi had greater interest in putting Caravaggio on the map and establishing the significance of his oeuvre in the public arena: the exhibition. Turning the first page of his introduction, Longhi redirects us to the topics that, in his opinion, merit greater consideration—religion, and history, for instance—and the “serietà morale della meditazione caravaggesca,” or the moral seriousness of the Caravaggesque meditation, as well as Caravaggio’s artistic ammunition galvanized by his “cervello stravagantissimo,” or extravagant brain.34

The unfortunate neglect and indifference to Caravaggio’s works over the course of centuries following his death gave Longhi the opportunity to counter exactly that by devoting a space to Caravaggio to spotlight his works and show his influences and influence. The distance of time, which gave him the advantage of greater objectivity, created a void that he filled with the amassed knowledge that resulted from his devotion to Caravaggio research35. This distance also offset susceptibilities to lines of thought that otherwise may have tinged his interpretation of Caravaggio’s works. Longhi approached Caravaggio through direct perception of his paintings and connoisseurship with a literary equivalency. In his obituary, Vitale Bloch described Longhi as both critic and connoisseur, he added that “the many-sidedness of his nature…united the ardent

34Longhi, Mostra del Caravaggio e dei Caravaggeschi, 18. Cardinal del Monte referred to Caravaggio as “cervello stravagantissimo,” Longhi relates.

35The following two publications greatly enriched Caravaggio research: Roberto Longhi, Ultimi studi sul Caravaggio e la sua cerchia (Florence, Italy: Sansoni, 1943); Longhi, “Me pinxit” e Quesiti caravaggeschi.
sensibility of the artist with the penetrating critical judgment of the scholar and philologist."36

The advantage of distance today gives us the ability to appreciate not only the immediate success that this exhibition boasted but also the implications it had for subsequent Caravaggio exhibitions. Longhi’s agenda, the stated three goals for his *Mostra*, was accomplished on every front. Firstly, he used the exhibition as a platform to glorify Caravaggio and elevate him to *maestro*; the exhibition space’s perimeter framed the artist and his works in a favorable light that incited a critical re-evaluation from the viewer. The inclusion of works by the *precaravaggeschi* and the *caravaggeschi* fulfilled Longhi’s first and second agenda items. By including works by his precursors and followers, Longhi articulated Caravaggio’s visual impact in corporeal form. The *precaravaggeschi* were part of the artist’s northern artistic heritage expressed in his raw naturalism. The inclusion of the *caravaggeschi* evidenced the magnitude of his influence. This established Caravaggio’s place in the canon as master and innovator of *naturalismo* and *chiaroscuro*. The format of this exhibition set the standard of presenting Caravaggio alongside the *caravaggeschi*. This allowed for the careful examination and comparison of works that revealed stylistic patterns, which allowed deeper engagement in the viewer. Caravaggio and his followers are two indivisible entities due to the model set by this exhibition.

The third goal, to bring together Caravaggio’s collective artistic spirit, was also achieved through the inclusion of the *caravaggeschi*, the embodiment of his artistic

values. This exhibition thrust Caravaggio out of darkness and into the light of public fascination. It has had an indelible mark in Caravaggio consciousness and laid the foundation for the subsequent intrigue that persists to this day.

The success of Mostra del Caravaggio e dei Caravaggeschi is evidenced by the positive reception it elicited from scholars who were at the time also contributing to Caravaggio research. It sparked a fury of publications by: Lionello Venturi (1951), Longhi (1952), Denis Mahon (1951), Bernard Berenson (1953), Roger Hink (1953), and Walter Friedlaender (1955), not to mention other scholars who participated in, and contributed to the discourse of chronology revisions and attributions. These publications were written in response to the renewed public interest in Caravaggio aroused by the Milan exhibition. Bernard Berenson thanked Longhi for his brave effort in establishing the baroque master’s canon in the first page of the introduction to his extended essay. Dennis Mahon commented on the vital stimulus that Caravaggio studies received from the Milan exhibition. He felt it created an upheaval in the artist’s “accepted conception.” Mahon also observed that the historic exhibition was a direct result of arduous collective research efforts, primarily by Roberto Longhi. The debt owed to Longhi for his commitment to Caravaggio’s restoration is echoed by almost every subsequent exhibition catalogue introduction and echoed by those who continue to advance Caravaggio studies today. The Metropolitan Museum of Art’s director Philippe de Montebello commented

that “more had been published about Caravaggio in the last three decades than during the preceding three hundred and fifty years.”

CHAPTER 2
THE AGE OF CARAVAGGIO: NEW FINDINGS AND CHANGED PERCEPTIONS

Many advancements in Caravaggio scholarship came about in the years between the 1951 Milan Mostra del Caravaggio e dei Caravaggeschi and the 1985 Age of Caravaggio at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The momentum generated by Longhi continued to push scholars toward new discoveries and new conclusions about the artist, his precursors, the world he lived and worked in, his patrons, and his contemporaries.

The Age of Caravaggio was the first large-scale exhibition of Caravaggio’s work ever held in the United States and the first to show his works in the context of his predecessors and his contemporaries. This major exhibition featured just fewer than forty works by Caravaggio, fourteen works by his north Italian precursors, and forty-five by the most prominent contemporary artists in Rome and Naples. Due to their fragility and celebrity, the altarpieces that traveled to Milan in 1951 were not lent to this exhibition by the Italian ministry. Longhi had foreseen thirty-four years earlier that the works that were graciously conferred to his show would not be lent with such facility to future exhibitions.

43Longhi, Mostra del Caravaggio e dei Caravaggeschi, 13.
The project was conceived in May of 1982 when the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali signed an agreement initiating a series of collaborative exhibitions, which opened lanes for exchange between the Met and Italian national museums. Raffaello Causa, the Soprintendente per i Beni Artistici e Storici in Naples, suggested that the first of these exhibitions be about the work of Caravaggio. A committee of international specialists was soon organized to give the exhibition a framework that represented current scholarship. The focal point of the exhibition was to present the visitor with an unprecedented survey of painting during Caravaggio’s lifetime, allowing the artist to be understood in his historical context.

The beautifully produced exhibition catalogue, dedicated to the memory of Roberto Longhi, opens with a brief historical overview by then museum director, Philippe de Montebello, that brings the reader up to speed on Caravaggio studies since Longhi’s seminal exhibition. It also contains three introductory essays that chronicle Caravaggio’s life in Rome, describe contemporary sentiments about his person and his work, and trace the twentieth-century developments in the appreciation of his art.

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paintings in the catalogue—black-and-white and color illustrations—are accompanied with short essays by a total of twenty-three specialists.⁴⁹

The novelty of this exhibition was its departure from the established format that was put into place by the Milan Mostra, a model that was followed by intervening exhibitions: Le Caravage et la peinture italienne du XVIIᵉ siècle at the Louvre in 1965, Caravaggio e Caravaggeschi nelle gallerie di Firenze at the Palazzo Pitti in 1970, and Caravaggio and His Followers at the Cleveland Museum of Art in 1971.⁵⁰ These three exhibitions presented Caravaggio’s work along with the works of his followers and thus was a topic that had been, in de Montebello’s view, sufficiently explored.⁵¹ These exhibitions yielded a clear understanding of Caravaggio’s profound impact on his followers and on European art. For this reason, the organizing committee determined that the topic of Caravaggio’s followers would be excluded. The focal point of the exhibition was to bring Caravaggio’s Northern Italian artistic origins to light and to contextualize his works; the topic of Caravaggism did little to extend the discourse on those fronts. What set The Age of Caravaggio apart from prior exhibitions was its focus on the relationship of the artist to his precursors and contemporaries, topics that necessitated further investigation.

The exhibition’s thematic configuration, in contrast to the linearity imposed by a chronological organization, conformed to its multidimensional aims. De Montebello provides a brief outline of sections by theme that gives a semblance of the layout: an

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⁵¹De Montebello et al., The Age of Caravaggio, foreword, 9.
introductory section exploring Caravaggio’s Lombard origins and Bellori’s belief that Caravaggio visited Venice; a section on Counter-Reformation painting (work by artists patronized by the new order of Catholic reform); a section on Ludovico and Annibale Carracci; and a last section that shows a representative selection of the younger artists active in Rome and Naples during Caravaggio’s lifetime, including Rubens, Adam Elsheimer, Guido Reni, Domenichino, Orazio Gentileschi, and Carlo Saraceni, among others.  

The Caravaggio persona from 1985 now differed considerably from that of the Caravaggio first presented to the public in 1951, as noted by de Montebello. Documentation had surfaced, which led to new attributions and revised chronologies, reshaping our perception of him as an artist and individual. These developments painted an image of a multifaceted man with a throbbing, pulsating humanity. New information on Caravaggio’s patrons revealed not only their intellectual pursuits and passions outside of art, but also insight about the social circles in which Caravaggio moved and the ideas that may have inspired him. Cardinal Francesco Maria del Monte’s interest in science (which was based on the observation and examination of nature), for instance, led him to keep an alchemist’s study where he performed experiments with medicine and pharmacology. Guidobaldo, the cardinal’s brother, wrote treatises on mechanics, mathematics, and perspective. As Luigi Salerno pointed out, the brothers also knew Galileo. It is highly likely that Caravaggio encountered his patron’s scientific interests,
the writings of Guidobaldo, and Galilean concepts. Music and literature were yet other fonti ispiratrici for Caravaggio, just as much as his works inspired his peers’ verses.

Giuseppe Cesari, called il Cavalier d’Arpino, introduced Caravaggio to the Roman intellectual elite. D’Arpino belonged to the exclusive literary society, Accademia degli Insensati; poet Aurelio Orsi (brother of Prospero, who trained under d’Arpino and was friends with Caravaggio) and Cardinal Maffeo Barberini (of whom Caravaggio painted a portrait) were among the members of the society.55 Because Caravaggio was in contact with these men, it is certain he was familiar with their writings. Madrigal writers and poets Gaspare Murtola and Giambattista Marino (who commissioned a portrait from Caravaggio) (Figure 2) wrote verses about the Lombard’s paintings. These writers extolled Caravaggio’s pictorial realism by infusing their poems with moralizing themes, symbolisms, and metaphors that they felt elevated and ennobled their craft. Caravaggio mirrored this by dignifying his models with moral lessons. Salerno pointed out that this layer of meaning was sadly forgotten and overlooked for centuries.56 The relationship with members of the intellectual aristocracy in Rome, as well as his acquaintance with prevailing themes in literature, offered Caravaggio a ripe cultural environment for artistic inspiration—a cross-directional exchange of ideas. This shed light on a different facet of the artist’s creativity and intellectualism that added to a more complex perception of the artist.

The most recent attribution that reshaped how scholars and the public perceived Caravaggio in the 1985 exhibition was the cleverly illusionistic Jupiter, Neptune, and

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Pluto painted *di sotto in su* in the camerino of Cardinal del Monte’s casino, now the Casino Ludovisi (Figure 3). The painting, which remains *in situ*, did not travel to this exhibition: however, it is discussed by Mina Gregori in her catalogue essay.\(^5^7\) Caravaggio had become incredibly well-versed in the depiction of half-length figures and cabinet pictures, which made this attribution surprising as it was uncharacteristic to his *oeuvre*, both in subject and dimension. Yet a close study of the work revealed the Caravaggesque details that attributionists were able to identify. A *sotto in su* work is not only an impressive artistic feat and even a physical challenge but entails showmanship due to the required skill in achieving *scorcio*, perspectival foreshortening, which Caravaggio impressively executed. Gregori supported Luigi Spezzaferro in his hypothesis in favor of this attribution.\(^5^8\) Spezzaferro had postulated that in the late 1590s, Caravaggio developed an interest in the perspective studies of Guidobaldo del Monte—who published *Perspectivae libri sex* in 1600.\(^5^9\) This was manifested with the execution of *Jupiter, Neptune, and Pluto* that exhibits a masterful use of perspective in the foreshortening of the figures. Another attribution that had recently gained wide acceptance was the *Bacchino malato (Sick Bacchus)*, in the Galleria Borghese in Rome, advanced by Roger Hink and supported by Mahon and Friedlaender in 1953.\(^6^0\)

\(^{5^7}\)Mina Gregori, “Caravaggio Today,” 36, in de Montebello et al., *The Age of Caravaggio*.  
After reviewing the developments that came about between the *Mostra del Caravaggio* and *The Age of Caravaggio* exhibitions, it is clear how perceptions of Caravaggio shifted. There is no question the intellectual climate of the time conditioned Caravaggio; science, literature, music, and perspective enriched his art on several levels that scholars have become better equipped at understanding. This exhibition revealed the lesser-known facets of Caravaggio’s personality by contextualizing him in the Roman intellectual society of which he, his peers, and patrons were active participants. The exhibition’s success was due in large part to the fulfillment of its initial agenda: to expose more about his Lombard origins and to contextualize his life and work, all while presenting the most recent scholarship that yielded a better understanding of his time. *The Age of Caravaggio* is a culmination of the collaborative efforts, in the years since 1951, that demonstrated that Caravaggio’s art was multilayered and more bound to his contemporary world than previously acknowledged. Longhi’s invocation, on behalf of Caravaggio, had been to reconsider the master as the first in the age of modern art, “*il primo dell’età moderna.*” The Caravaggio-Courbet and Caravaggio-Manet connections, as observed from the twentieth-century standpoint, were irrefutable. By 1985, these conceptions were taken for granted and cemented, yet documentary evidence and new attributions called for a reassessment of the artist, a shift in our understanding of the artistic catalysts that informed his creations.

The following year, a film titled *Caravaggio* was released in the United Kingdom. The fictionalized biopic by acclaimed British director Derek Jarman characterized the

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artist as an eccentric and deviant bisexual involved in a love triangle with Ranuccio Tomassoni, murdered in a climactic scene—a true crime of passion. It opens with a moribund Caravaggio, vacillating in and out of consciousness as he awaits impending death, his introspection manifests in poetic monologue:


*L'acqua salsa gocciola dalle mie dita lasciando una traccia di piccole lacrime sulla sabbia cocente.*

*I pescatori mi portano alto sulle loro spalle, posso sentirti piangere, Jerusalemmme.*

*Ruvide mani scaldano il mio corpo morente strappato al freddo mare azzurro.*

*Mi stanno riportando remi verso il villaggio, è tiepido il loro respiro sulle mie labbra violace.*

*Sto morendo al ritmo dei remi che affondano nell’acqua.*

*Se bracci forti come queste mi avessero abbracciato nella vita....*  

*Pensare Jerusalemmme, che la nostra amicizia dovesse finire in questa stanza, in questa fredda stanza bianca, tanto lontana da casa.*

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63 *Caravaggio*. Directed by Derek Jarman. United Kingdom: Kino International, 1986. DVD, 93 min. “Malta, Syracuse, Messina, Naples, Porto Ercole, July 18, 1610. Four years on the run. So many luggage labels and almost never a friendly face. Always on the run. A fugitive on the poisonous blue sea, fleeing under the July sun, adrift. The water dripping from my fingers leaves a trace of small tears on the scorching sand. The fishermen take me high on their shoulders, I can hear you crying, Jerusalemmme. Rough hands warm my dying body torn from the cold blue sea. They are bringing me back to the village, their breath feels warm on my violet lips. I am dying to the rhythm of the oars that sink in the water. If only strong arms like these had embraced me in life...to think, Jerusalemmme, that our friendship would end in this room, in this cold white room, so far from home.”
Just one year after *The Age of Caravaggio*, this film indicates that a new perception shift was taking place. The artist’s life as tragic drama was taking center stage, capturing the imagination of a growing audience.
CHAPTER 3
L’ULTIMO TEMPO/THE FINAL YEARS: ARTIST AND FUGITIVE

The final exhibition to be discussed fittingly correlates to the final years of the artist’s life. Caravaggio: L’ultimo tempo at the Museo di Capodimonte (October 23, 2004 – January 23, 2005) traveled to the National Gallery in London as Caravaggio: The Final Years (February 23 – May 22, 2005).\textsuperscript{64} The exhibition takes the works produced in the last four years of his life, 1606–1610, as its focus: the period of the artist’s exile from Rome until his death. Fleeing papal jurisdiction after stabbing and killing Ranuccio Tomassoni in a tennis match-turned duel, Caravaggio was sheltered by his longtime protectors, the Colonna, in the Alban Hills. For the next four years, he made stops in Naples, Malta, Syracuse and finally Porto Ercole where he met his tragic demise before ever reaching Rome for papal pardon. Compelled by the paranoia of a fugitive, he nomadically moved from city to city, leaving behind traces of his fleeting presence. Caravaggio’s volatile temperament made him many enemies, yet despite his shortcomings and lapses in behavioral decorum, Caravaggio’s opportunities for atonement presented themselves as commissions from eager patrons willing to overlook rumors of past transgressions.

This two-venue exhibition was first proposed as a joint venture by Nicola Spinosa, of the Museo di Capodimonte in Naples, to David Jaffé and Gabriele Finaldi at

\textsuperscript{64}The English version of the catalogue is Silvia Cassani, et al., Caravaggio: The Final Years (Naples, Italy: Electra Napoli, 2005). The Italian version is Silvia Cassani, et al., Caravaggio: L’ultimo tempo (Naples: Electa Napoli, 2004).
the National Gallery in London and to Philippe de Montebello and Keith Christiansen at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. However, after struggling to secure loans for three venues, it was agreed that the exhibition would be presented only in Naples and London, yet still benefit from Christiansen’s contributions and participation.\textsuperscript{65} Previous Caravaggio shows had by this time adequately explored his artistic circle, and his legacy and influence on subsequent seventeenth-century European artists. This exhibition’s specific focus on a single period of his career distinguishes itself from many before it. Prior to examining the content of \textit{Caravaggio: L’ultimo tempo/Caravaggio: The Final Years}, however, I will first expand on the scope, limitations, differences between the two venues, and the uniqueness of each exhibition.

\textbf{Scope, Limitations And Differences}

As stated in the opening of this chapter, \textit{L’ultimo tempo/The Final Years} spotlights the works painted in the last four years of Caravaggio’s life, 1606-1610, from his escape to the Alban hills after fatally stabbing a man, to Naples, Malta, Sicily, back to Naples then to his abortive departure back to Rome for a papal pardon that never materialized due to his death at Porto Ercole. This exhibition, of less than twenty paintings, offered the unique opportunity to view an unusual number of his ultimate works together.\textsuperscript{66} In terms of loan limitations, the portrait of Alof de Wignacourt (Figure 4) was not conceded, in what Spinosa observes, has become standard practice for the

\textsuperscript{65}Cassani, et al., \textit{Caravaggio: The Final Years}, 11.

Louvre. In Naples, two of the Maltese works were absent: the Beheading of Saint John (Figure 5), too large to travel, and the too fragile Saint Jerome Writing (Figure 6); these were replaced by full-size reproductions. The monumental Seven Works of Mercy (Figure 7), restored for Capodimonte, and the Burial of Saint Lucy (Figure 8), along with newly posited attributions, did not travel to London. The so-called copie fedele of lost originals: Saint Francis in Meditation (Figure 9) and the Flagellation (Figure 10) along with copies of the master’s works by other artists, also did not travel to London.

Caravaggio: L’ultimo tempo/Caravaggio: The Final Years was the first exhibition to concentrate on the last segment of his life, naturally the most controversial period (due to the incident that demarcates its outset). Though it stood on the shoulders of more than a half-century’s trove of research, a movement stirred primarily by Roberto Longhi and his 1951 Mostra, this exhibition presented new findings by Keith Sciberras and David M. Stone, who demystified Caravaggio’s time in Malta. Another distinguishing facet of this exhibition, evident in Spinosa’s preface to the catalogue, is the remarkable self-awareness and institutional self-examination of the museum’s double function as cultural portal and as revenue-generating machine mobilized by blockbuster exhibitions. This adds a new layer to the museum show’s underlying agenda. In Caravaggio’s case, the museum exhibition was the platform that had catapulted him to fame and recognition in the twenty-first century. Now, more than a half-century after that first landmark show in 1951, any exhibition title with the name Caravaggio attracts

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69Spinosa, preface, 11, in Cassani, et al., Caravaggio: The Final Years.
throngs of zealous visitors flocking to galleries to gaze reverently upon his dark canvases. The tide has turned in the fifty-four years that separate Longhi’s Milan Mostra from the 2005 opening at Capodimonte, whereas the impetus of the former was precisely to reintroduce and restore Caravaggio’s status in the canon, the latter enjoyed the luxury of the master’s ‘brand recognition’ thanks to Longhi’s and successive scholars’ efforts.\textsuperscript{70}

Caravaggio has now joined the pantheon of museum blockbuster artists such as Van Gogh and Picasso, who, as Nicola Spinosa points out, are \textit{peintre maudit}, “damned painters,” a guarantee to bring in massive quantities of visitors.\textsuperscript{71} The blockbuster phenomenon not only creates interest among museum-goers but also commercial interest by the services and marketing sectors who pervade public spaces with advertisement; they spawn merchandise—t-shirts, mugs, posters, totes—with the familiar face and works of the artist. This profit-making incentive is a central aim in the production of exhibitions and constitutes a major aspect of the overall museum agenda. The security guard who admonishes you to stay behind stanchions holds a hand-clicker that counts every visitor. Indeed, visitor statistics have become increasingly crucial not only for number monitoring but as a measure of an exhibition’s success. Every click indicates a purchased admission or membership, an exit through the gift shop that hopefully results in memento and souvenir purchases. In simplest terms, greater foot traffic means a higher profit for institutions that as repositories of the past strive, through exhibitions, to stay relevant in

\textsuperscript{70}Richard E. Spear, “Caravaggiomania” \textit{Art in America}, \url{https://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/magazines/caravaggiomania/} (November 23, 2010). In this entertaining essay, Spear, succinctly chronicles the rise of Caravaggio’s nineteenth and twentieth-century popularity and credits museum exhibitions and their catalogues as “…crucial component[s] of this Caravaggio industry” and of creating Caravaggiomania.

\textsuperscript{71}Spinosa, preface, 12, in Silvia Cassani, et al., \textit{Caravaggio: The Final Years}.
the present. Spinosa rightly predicts that profiting from the tortured artist’s celebrity by museum organizers and visitor services “will continue […] and not because it meets any real scientific or cultural need, but simply because—as everyone knows—the name Caravaggio is a guaranteed crowd-puller.”72 The exhibitions with crowd-pulling power that Spinosa is critical of are those that “trade on [Caravaggio’s] name” some which feature mere photographic reproductions or uncertain attributions of the master’s works.73 For example, in March 2016 an exhibition titled, Caravaggio Experience opened at the Palazzo delle Esposizioni in Rome.74 Not a single canvas was displayed, but rather a video installation—in true contemporary fashion—which projected large close-ups of the snake-haired gorgon, a flagellated Christ and a Holofernes amid sanguine decapitation, among other Caravaggio opere displayed or rather shown (Figure 11a). The Caravaggio Experience was not merely a glorified slideshow, however; there was a musical and olfactory experience to go along with visuals (Figure 11b). Despite its originality and contemporary twist, it fits the description of the type of inflated event that Spinosa excoriates.75

72Cassani, et al., Caravaggio: The Final Years, 12.
73Cassani, et al., Caravaggio: The Final Years, 12.
74The Caravaggio Experience was on view at the Palazzo delle Esposizioni in Rome from March 16- July 4, 2016. The press release on the museum’s website explains the nature of the exhibition, “l’uso di un sofisticato sistema di multi-proiezione a grandissime dimensioni, combinato con musiche originali e fragranze olfattive, porta il visitatore a vivere un’esperienza unica sul piano sensoriale, attraverso una vera e propria “immersione” nell’arte del maestro del seicento.”
https://www.palazzoesposizioni.it/mostra/caravaggio-experience
75Cassani, et al., Caravaggio: The Final Years, 12.
Content

There are two key points about Caravaggio: L’ultimo tempo/Caravaggio: The Final Years that I will examine: first, the proposed attributions to Caravaggio, and second, the David with the Head of Goliath (Figure 1) as a case study (I will elaborate below why this work is significant and merits focus). These points will lay out the distinctiveness of the 2005 Naples/London exhibition, clarify whether the aim was fulfilled, and provide insight into the ever-developing Caravaggio scholarship. Thus, I shall elucidate how this exhibition shifted perception of the artist towards the narrative of his life and its relation to the interpretation of his works and career.

The question of proposed attributions are central to this discussion as they give insight into the mechanisms that inform scholars’ inclinations; are they grounded in rigorous observation and documentary evidence or swayed by wishful thinking? Naples was the only location that featured a section devoted to new attribution proposals, compelling viewers to formulate opinions about their validity. This is a rare instance of academic esoteric discourse dipping into the public sphere. In fact, scholar Clare Robertson noted that the absence of these works was not to the detriment of the London show; except for Saint Francis in Meditation (Figure 12), she considered none to have plausible claims to be by Caravaggio.76 The five attributed paintings were: two versions of Saint John the Baptist at the Spring (Figures 13, 14), Ecce Homo (Figure 15), Salome with the Head of Saint John the Baptist (Figure 16), and the possible exception, Saint Francis in Meditation (Figure 12).

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Only one of the two versions of Saint Francis in Meditation (Figure 12), attributed to the Lombard, was exhibited at Caravaggio: L’ultimo tempo in Naples. The other version, from the church of Santa Maria della Concezione in Rome (Figure 17), is accepted as a copy of the one displayed for this exhibition, from the church of San Pietro in Carpineto Romano. The Santa Maria della Concezione picture was first attributed to Caravaggio by Giulio Cantalamessa in 1908. Cantalamessa invokes Caravaggio’s name with certitude, the immediacy of the composition commanded Cantalamessa to pronounce Caravaggio upon discovering it at the sacristy of Santa Maria della Concezione. Cantalamessa writes that the picture possesses the master’s “tocco sicuro,” or “sure touch,” yet beyond a strong hunch supported by the stylistic integrity and quality of this painting, no known documentation concretely renders the Saint Francis an autograph work. In 1968, an identical picture was identified by Maria Vittoria Brugnoli at Carpineto, and debate followed. Uncertainty was put to rest by scientific analyses and a restoration conducted in 2000, which exposed pentimenti in the Carpineto picture and none in the Concezione version. Moreover, the cleanings performed on the paintings made variations more apparent, favoring the Carpineto version’s “more confident spatial construction” as opposed to the other’s anatomically compressed Saint Francis. There are also technical differences between the two; in the Carpineto version the Saint’s girdle appears crisper. The Concezione’s Saint Francis is enveloped by a soft light that caresses his temple, the sleeve covering his arm extending to hold the skull he contemplates; the

77 Cassani, et al., Caravaggio: The Final Years, 151.
80 Cassani, et al., Caravaggio: The Final Years, 151.
Carpineto Saint Francis appears austere with rigid contours, the Saint flushed with a raking light that severely contrasts surrounding shadows.

In terms of its dating and commission, Rossella Vodret finds Brugnoli’s hypothesis the most plausible.\textsuperscript{81} The analysis performed on the Carpineto version of Saint Francis revealed a modification to the hood of his habit. The pointed cowl was changed to the rounded one associated with the Reformed Minors. Cardinal Pietro Aldobrandini, who is believed to have owned the picture, first intended to confer it upon the Capuchins (for whom he founded the church of Carpineto in 1609) but gave it to the Reformed Minors instead. Although it is not clear for whom Caravaggio painted the \textit{Saint Francis}, Spinosa’s thoughts are in line with the predominating notion that it was a private commission from Pietro Aldobrandini, who bestowed it to the monastery in Carpineto after his death in 1621. Another theory is that Caravaggio, upon taking refuge with his protectors at Zagarolo in the Alban Hills in 1606, painted it for the Colonna who, known to have patronized the Capuchin order since 1536, subsequently donated it to the church of Carpineto.\textsuperscript{82}

The Concezione \textit{Saint Francis}, who displays the pointed cowl, was evidently painted before modifications to the Carpineto \textit{Saint Francis} were made and undoubtedly before 1617, the year of Francesco de Rustici’s death, who donated the picture to the Capuchin church of Santa Maria della Concezione.\textsuperscript{83}

Another two of the works attributed to Caravaggio included in the Naples exhibition depict \textit{Saint John at the Spring}, one being a cut-down, smaller, horizontally-

\textsuperscript{81}Cassani, et al., \textit{Caravaggio: The Final Years}, 151.
\textsuperscript{82}Cassani, et al., \textit{Caravaggio: The Final Years}, 151.
\textsuperscript{83}Cassani, et al., \textit{Caravaggio: The Final Years}, 151.
oriented variant (Figure 14) of the full-length vertical composition of Saint John leaning over to drink from a spring (Figure 13). These works are typical of the artist’s late style corresponding to his period in Sicily and return to Naples. In July 1610 when Caravaggio set sail for Rome, in anticipation of papal pardon, he took with him “two Saint Johns and a Magdalen” as Baglione details. Scholars agree that one of these Saint Johns is the *Saint John the Baptist* of the Galleria Borghese in Rome. The other Saint John, also intended as a gift for Cardinal Scipione Borghese, suffered a different fate, as it never reached the Cardinal. Ferdinando Peretti as well as Denis Mahon and Mina Gregori concur in identifying the full-length *Saint John at the Spring*, exhibited in Naples, as the other Saint John that Caravaggio brought along with him on the felucca. The smaller, cut-down version, also displayed in Naples, is, according to Gregori, a copy of the full-length original, also by Caravaggio.

The last two attributions shown in Naples, *Ecce Homo* (Figure 15) and *Salome with the Head of Saint John the Baptist* (Figure 16), are the least likely to be autograph works based solely on stylistic grounds, although there is some debate. Though documentary evidence supports the existence of an *Ecce Homo* and a *Salome*, it scarcely constitutes proof that these particular works are by the master himself. They could very well be copies after originals, yet their immediate stylistic discrepancies too conspicuous to be autograph.

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84 Cassani, et al., *Caravaggio: The Final Years*, 162.
85 Cassani, et al., *Caravaggio: The Final Years*, 151.
86 Cassani, et al., *Caravaggio: The Final Years*, 162.

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Mina Gregori, along with Gianni Pappi, endorses claims that the *Ecce Homo* is an autograph work. Gregori draws compositional comparisons to the *Saint John the Baptist at the Spring* and the juxtaposition of the figures to both versions of the *Salome with the Head of John the Baptist* in London (Figure 18) and Madrid (Figure 19). Gregori notes that there is evidence of existence of an *Ecce Homo*, as reported by Elena Fumagalli, in a list of paintings owned by Michelangelo Vanni, which mentions a copy of an original Ecce Homo after Caravaggio. Gregori also cites correspondence between Giulio Mancini and his brother Deifobo mentioning a copy that belonged to Vanni. The collection inventory of Don Andrea Valdina, taken after his death in 1659, lists no. 7 as an *Ecce Homo*.

Although it seems possible to believe that a copy after an original by Caravaggio exists, it is problematic to accept this work as autograph; it is more likely to be a copy authored by a different, as yet unidentified, artist. I find that the documentary evidence in support of Caravaggio as the author not sufficiently convincing primarily on grounds of deficient documentation and secondly on stylistic disparities. The most Caravaggesque features that render this a convincing copy after a possible original by Caravaggio are the following characteristics: the half-length composition, the strong chiaroscuro and the second figure from right, the character type of the elder with the furrowed brow. We have seen this old man before, likely serving as a model to the artist on several occasions, and in at least two other paintings, the *Incredulity of Saint Thomas* (Figure 20) as one of the

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doubting men positioned at the top center and as the overzealous Abraham in the
*Sacrifice of Isaac* (Figure 21). The old man in the purported *Ecce Homo* is, in my belief,
diluted from another source; clearly based on the recurring figure previously seen in other
Caravaggio works. He bears the bald head, the brow and nasolabial folds that
characterize the model, yet the *Ecce Homo* old man’s nose is distinctly different.
Although prominent, the nose of *Ecce Homo*’s elder is bulbous compared to the
Caravaggio model’s elegant aquiline nose. The distinctions do not end there; the four
figures possess a caricature-like quality not characteristic of the master. The flesh
coloring is flat and soft, the contours too harsh, the grasp of their hands too tepid;
moreover, the upturned closed fist with extended index finger and thumb at the center of
the composition seems unfinished. These characteristics do not belong in the realm of
Caravaggio’s artistic modus, and in my view, are sufficiently divergent from the artist’s
style to render the work a copy, not an original.

The *Salome with the Head of Saint John the Baptist* (Figure 16) is suspected to be
the work that Caravaggio purportedly painted in hopes of allaying the Grand Master’s ire
after his dishonororable escape from the Order of the Knights of Jerusalem in Malta.
Bellori recounted, “Seeking to regain the favor of the Grand Master of Malta, he sent him
as a gift a half-length figure of Herodias with the head of Saint John the Baptist in a
basin.”92 Bologna believed Bellori presumably meant to name Salome, Herodias’s
daughter, in his erroneous description.93 Longhi had attempted to identify this work by

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Fiedlaender cites Bellori, “Cercando di placare il Gran Maestro, gli mandò in dono una mezza figura di
Herodiade con la testa di San Giovanni nel bacino.” See Pietro Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters,
Sculptors and Architects* (Rome, Italy: Mascardi, 1672).
93Cassani, et al., *Caravaggio: The Final Years*, 158.
first assessing Caravaggio’s two well-known works of the same subject, the one at the Palacio Real in Madrid (Figure 19) and the other at the National Gallery in London (Figure 18). Those two works however, feature three half-length figures as opposed to “a half-length figure” as detailed by Bellori. Though the Salome with the *Head of Saint John the Baptist* exhibited at the Naples show fits the compositional description of the work that Caravaggio painted for the Grand Master of the Order of Saint John, the stylistic properties seem too aberrant for an autograph work. Ferdinando Bologna expounded that upon seeing the *Salome* before its cleaning, he believed it to be a copy; when reexamining the work after the cleaning, he deemed it an original. Bologna noted the *Salome*’s affinities to other works of Caravaggio’s Malta and Naples period of 1608-09, namely, the *Beheading of Saint John the Baptist* of 1608, the altarpiece for the Oratory of San Giovanni Decollato, painted after Caravaggio learned that the pope had sent a waiver in favor of knighting him. Bologna pointed out, “if one looks closely, one can see that ‘Herodias/Salome’ is the same girl who is bending over to receive the head of the Baptist in the *Beheading* in Malta.” Bologna also indicated that the basin held by the Salome/Herodias is the same as the one held by the bent Salome in Caravaggio’s signed altarpiece; furthermore, he found the heads of both Saint Johns to be very similar. Bologna’s conclusions do not seem feasible based on observation. For example, the golden basin that Salome/Herodias clasps, angled to expose the underside, exhibits a lined pattern, whereas Salome in the sadistic scene of execution displays a basin with elongated oval shapes around the circumference. The soon-to-be-severed head of the

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94 Cassani, et al., *Caravaggio: The Final Years*, 158.
95 Cassani, et al., *Caravaggio: The Final Years*, 171.
96 Cassani, et al., *Caravaggio: The Final Years*, 158.
splayed Saint John exhibits middle-parted light brown locks that appear golden where the light reflects; the severed Saint John in the basin of Salome/Herodias has unparted monochromatic dark brown hair. Bologna concluded, without detailed comparison, that the Salome/Herodias is the very same girl of Caravaggio’s altarpiece. Once again, the differences are numerous: the bent Salome does not wear the hair adornments or earring of the Salome/Herodias. Moreover, besides these small details, the quality of the chiaroscuro is poor, the contour of the figures hazy and imprecise, the left hand of the Herodias/Salome is bulky and rough-edged, as if painted with a course, bristly brush. Salome/Herodias’s countenance is not the exquisitely detailed, crisp and portrait-like face with “photograph”-quality chiaroscuro characteristic of Caravaggio. Both figures, living and dead, rather seem to possess caricature-like features that do not invoke the style or technique of the Lombard master.

That Bologna believed the *Salome with the Head of Saint John the Baptist* was painted “in quick succession” indicates that the insertion of this work into the artist’s chronology was a product of scholarly haste and wishful thinking, as the documentary evidence is once again lacking and the stylistic and technical properties not compatible with that of Caravaggio. Though this painting conforms to Bellori’s account of a half-length figure, it does not meet Caravaggio’s artistic caliber. The attributions of *Ecce Homo* and the *Salome with the Head of Saint John the Baptist* to Caravaggio are a result of a desire to fill a void in the artist’s documentary chronicle and not a consequence of rigorous observation and comparison.

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97 Ferdinando Bologna, “New Proposals: *Salome with the Head of Saint John the Baptist,*” 158, in *Caravaggio: The Final Years.* Bologna postulates that the painting of Salome (Figure 15) is the one Bellori described as a “half length figure of Herodias” and believes it to possess “all the hallmarks of Caravaggio.”
A Case Study

The *David with the Head of Goliath* (Figure 1) was one in the group of final paintings that concluded Caravaggio’s chronologically ordered exhibition of autograph works in both Naples and London for *Caravaggio: L’ultimo tempo/Caravaggio: The Final Years*. The question of this work’s execution date is as central as the attribution proposal discussion above. Once again we see the impact of Caravaggio’s romanticized life episodes impinging on scholar’s date determination. The date of this work has been a point of debate, with two divergent camps: one earlier generation of scholars that initially proposed the earlier 1605-06 date; and the more recent favoring a date of 1610, thereby making this one of the artist’s last works. The general inclination predominating now among scholars is the later date, as will be discussed. Bellori informs us that the *David* was painted for Cardinal Scipione Borghese, indicating it may have been painted when Scipione and his favored artist had direct contact with each other, which led to the assumption that it was painted in Rome, before his flight, in 1606, or soon after in Naples, Malta or Sicily.98 Nikolaus Pevsner, Lionello Venturi and Denis Mahon agreed on this date.99

In 1951, when Roberto Longhi examined the picture of the *David* he noted the stylistic similarities between it and the *Salome* of the National Gallery, decidedly placing the *David* at the beginning of his second visit to Naples in September-October 1609, just a few months before the artist’s death.100 Longhi based this conclusion on stylistic

100Cassani, et al., *Caravaggio: The Final Years*, 137.
similarities with works of Caravaggio’s latest phase. In 1990, Maurizio Calvesi endorsed this date advancing the argument by connecting it to the artist’s biography. Calvesi advanced the idea of a psychological frame of understanding that focuses on the undercurrents that give insight into the tormented artist’s psyche. Calvesi conjectured that Caravaggio sent the David to Scipione Borghese to persuade him to intercede on his behalf for papal pardon and permission to return to Rome.

Anna Coliva, the Galleria Borghese director, related that technical and diagnostic analyses, conducted during restorations in 1998 of all Caravaggio works in the Borghese Collection, make technical distinctions between his Roman works and his late works apparent. The Saint John the Baptist (Figure 22) and David revealed technical affinities to The Martyrdom of Saint Ursula (Figure 27), his last known work, with the use of risparmio, in which light colors overlay dark tones. Moreover, Coliva summarized Vincenzo Pacelli’s research that revealed proof that the David was dispatched from Naples to Cardinal Borghese in Rome. The key to Pacelli’s proof lies in the copy made immediately after Caravaggio’s death by the Viceroy of Naples. Documents dated November 5, 1610, affirm that the painter Baldassare Alvise, also known as Galanino, made two copies of Caravaggio’s David, one of which was likely for the Viceroy. Consequently, it can now be affirmed that the David was evidently in Naples for these copies to be made and then, probably along with the Saint John the Baptist, sent to Cardinal Borghese.

102 Cassani, et al., Caravaggio: The Final Years, 137.
Of the three works we know Caravaggio carried with him on his journey back to Rome, “two Saint Johns and a Magdalen,” only one Saint John reached Cardinal Borghese. The other, purported to be the Saint John the Baptist at the Spring, along with the Saint John the Baptist and a Magdalen, were taken on the felucca that Caravaggio was separated from on his final desperate expedition. These three paintings traveled back to Naples, leaving the detained Caravaggio behind, and sparked a frenzy over their ownership; the Viceroy, the Order of Saint John and Borghese all wanted to claim them. The copies ordered by the Viceroy seem to have settled matters. This may explain the iterations and cut-down versions of the Saint John at the Spring, discussed at length above.104 Thus, the David and its cognate, the Saint John the Baptist landed in the same collection in Rome.

Why the David remained in Naples almost four months after Caravaggio’s death, is still not clear. If this work, as Calvesi postulates, was an intercessory plea, would it not have been more effective had it reached Scipione Borghese before Caravaggio set off on the felucca?105 We know that it was not one of the works that he carried with him on the boat headed for Rome; it leaves us to conclude that the David was in Naples at the time of Caravaggio’s departure from that city and several months after his death in July of 1610.

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104 Consensus has not been reached regarding the confirmed authorship of these two versions of the Saint John at the Spring. Ferdinando Peretti as well as Denis Mahon and Mina Gregori concur in identifying the full-length Saint John at the Spring, exhibited in Naples, as one of the paintings that Caravaggio brought along with him on the felucca on his way back to Rome. See pg. 26-27 of this thesis for discussion on proposed attributions.

Though the painting was intended for Borghese, I think it a product of modern romantic invention to ascertain an execution date for this work based on the remorse that, as it is deduced by the application of psychological theory, plagued the artist’s soul toward the end of his life. Furthermore, one cannot predicate that the David played any part in influencing or determining Caravaggio’s pardon, still less if it did not reach Cardinal Borghese in the last months of the artist’s life. While it is widely accepted that Goliath is Caravaggio’s self-portrait, and while the artist may have identified with the role of victim in spiritual torment, constructing a psychological profile from a darkly-themed self-portrait plays to sensationalism. Even more absurd is the idea that his self-portrait as Goliath was foretelling, that Caravaggio subconsciously intuited his imminent end. If anything is clear, it is that the nomadic conduct that characterized his last four years resulted from constant pursuit, near captures and repeated escapes precisely because he wanted to live and overcome those adverse conditions. I do not consider that Caravaggio foresaw his untimely demise, dejected and vanquished with despair. From the time of his relocation to Rome in 1592, we see his ambition. The invenzione he brought to the iconographic tradition speaks of ingenuity and a hunger for acknowledgment. His knighting in Malta, one of the highest honors to be bestowed, tells of his desire to be respected. His attempts to assuage the Grand Master and pope express a need for forgiveness and acceptance. These are the visceral motives that governed him, not a

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106Stone “Self and Myth in Caravaggio’s David and Goliath,” 41. Stone argues that David with the Head of Goliath was not “an act of contrition… and submission to divine judgment” as it is not possible that Caravaggio could have predicted his death. Instead, Stone sees Caravaggio’s self-representation as “part of a novel Christian representation of the biblical story, one that runs parallel to the other levels of meaning Caravaggio constructed…” This picture thus expresses a strong Christian message that has long been overlooked in favor of psychoanalytic readings of the painting.
supposed dark psychological predisposition manifested through self-insertion. Depicting himself in the role of characters participating in a scene, active or passive, was not out of the ordinary for Caravaggio; we see him also in the role of sick Bacchus (Figure 23), and as the empathetic witness to the horrific martyrdom of Saint Matthew (Figure 24). With Caravaggio’s heavy reliance on the model, it is logical that he would use himself as such, with only a mirror and his reflection necessary. Bearing this in mind, when we revisit Caravaggio’s self-portrait in the David, it no longer seems a psychological anomaly, but rather a device of practicality and perhaps a subcategory of his invenzione.

In 1990, Calvesi interpreted Caravaggio’s beheaded Goliath, as a despairing allusion to death, his identification with the slain Philistine sinner as supplication for forgiveness. While the supposition that the David with the Head of Goliath was allegedly intended to rekindle Scipione Borghese’s favor, and by extension the pope’s, is valid and sensible, I disagree with Calvesi’s psychoanalytical theoretical framework. Attempting to infer or speculate about Caravaggio’s inner convictions, psychosomatic nature or unmanifested frustrations is circular reasoning; it remains a thing of conjecture and not a concrete fact. Calvesi’s interpretation is, based on Caravaggio’s romanticized vita, reminiscent of the artist’s contemporary biographer/critics and a continuation of this inherited line of thought.

107The identification of self-portraits within Caravaggio’s history pictures has been one of many scholarly preoccupations. Although his biographers did not comment on the meaning of Caravaggio’s self-portraits, Stone comments that the artist’s self-representation as Goliath and as the jaundiced Bacchus (Figure 23) were acts of deliberate artistic intention and “self-fashioning” in, “Self and Myth in Caravaggio’s David and Goliath,” 37-38. In 1986, Gerald Eager discussed Caravaggio’s identified self-portraits in Gerald Eager, "Born Under Mars: Caravaggio's Self-Portraits and the Dada Spirit in Art." Notes in the History of Art 5, no 2 (1986): 23-24. Eager included the David with the Head of Goliath, Sick Bacchus, The Beheading of Saint John, and The Martyrdom of Saint Matthew as recognized self-portraits and added that the latter might have served as Ottavio Leoni’s basis for his portrait of Caravaggio.

Back to the question of the *David*’s date of execution, and concurring with the late date of 1609-10, this conclusion is also based on the stylistic and technical resemblance of the *David* with other accepted late works, namely the *Martyrdom of Saint Ursula* (Figure 27). As Anna Coliva points out, the expression of David’s face, guilt-ridden and compassionate, resonates with the expression of the figure whose hand extends ineffectively to protect Ursula from the Tyrant’s arrow.\(^\text{109}\) I would like to add that there is also an analogous relationship to the *Denial of Saint Peter* (Figure 25), another late work. The accusing woman’s covering is very similar to David’s blouse, the creases, texture, and vertical patterns of light are, well, cut from the same cloth. These three works exhibit the same light source, emanating from the top left quadrant of the picture; yellowish-browns and maroons dominate these compositions. Grounded in the connections between these three works, the *David with the Head of Goliath* was logically executed 1609-1610, a product of the artist’s last phase, fittingly belonging in the category of his final years.

Though psychoanalysis as a methodological approach has fallen out of use in the decades since Calvesi’s publication, it persists occasionally in flickers.\(^\text{110}\) In Nicola Spinosa’s preface to *L’ultimo tempo/The Final Years*, even he writes that Caravaggio might have “sensed his approaching end.”\(^\text{111}\) I am not certain the romanticization of Caravaggio will ever cease. His life is too fraught with the tragedy that is the stuff of stories historians adore to construct, or rather theorize about, because we do not know for certain how events transpired. While these tendencies endure, I call for a refocus and


\(^{110}\)Calvesi, *Le Realtà del Caravaggio*.

reframing of Caravaggio by taking his works as points of departure supplemented with
documentation to back theories and bridge gaps. Though sensationalist narratives and
Caravaggiomania sway us to interpret Caravaggio’s works through a romanticized lens, it
serves to be aware of these mechanisms to approach Caravaggio in an evaluative and
sober manner. The critics of his time have done their part to scrutinize and opine on
Caravaggio’s inner turmoil and life; it is not our role to promote that sensationalist
discourse as such. Our task, to foster a clearer understanding of his works, is to analyze
and piece together art with such documentary and archival remnants to reconstruct an
honest chronicle of his artistic career.

As a closing remark to this chapter I will state that, from what I construed of the
catalogue, reception and reviews, *L’ultimo tempo/The Final Years* was greatly successful
in accomplishing its primary aim of exhibiting a well thought-out and organized account
of the last four years of Caravaggio’s life, spotlighting the works he produced from 1606-
1610. The Naples show simultaneously, and as a secondary aim, exhibited the old copies
and newest proposals to the Caravaggio *oeuvre*, utilizing the exhibition platform to raise
and open the conversation of attributions to the public and academic domains. The
London show may have benefitted from the omission of this add-on, presenting a more
nimble and largely accepted autograph lineup of works with an informational/educational
agenda, in comparison to Naple’s multilayered program. The exhibition’s circumscribed
focus furnished an opportunity to dig and unearth details that clarify Caravaggio’s last
chapter. *L’ultimo empo/The Final Years* distinguished itself by being the first to
emphasize the art of his last years. Never had these works been amassed collectively and
cohesively in a single space. Vis-à-vis perception shifts, this exhibition treated the tumult
of his last four years with straightforward examination of his works and the events surrounding them. There was no blatant exploitation of his persona, but rather a quest to bring to light his works chronologically, to highlight this phase’s stylistic and technical intonations and to give an honest reporting of what had been uncovered from his works and fragmentary archival material. The sensationalist factor that typifies his life was quelled by the exhibition’s temperate tenor, the exhibition catalogue entries display thoroughness and new findings add to the continuing development of Caravaggio studies.
CONCLUSION

In the fifty-plus years that spanned from the *Mostra del Caravaggio e dei Caravaggeschi* (1951) to the *Age of Caravaggio* (1985) to *L’ultimo tempo/The Final Years* (2004-2005) we observe a steady upsurge in the study of and fascination in the artist by academic circles and the public respectively. We see the artist thrust onto the museum stage by Longhi in an exhibition of encyclopedic nature, we learn of the cultural climate and network of contemporaries and patrons in the Metropolitan show, and in the final exhibit we see the last four years of his life unfold. Caravaggio’s negatively crystallized repute and character were given reconsideration by these exhibitions that exposed new facets of his technique, style development, chronology, and his art, even sparking attribution debates. Moreover, these exhibitions exposed the aims, agendas and methodological approaches that framed his work. They provide the impetus that drives research to new findings and historians to write his history.

In review of Caravaggio’s exhibition trajectory, specialists and exhibition organizers have gained better awareness about the pivotal role they play in the determination of this artist’s history and consequently the perception of such by their audience. The rise of the blockbuster phenomenon, which at times undermines the educational value of an exhibition, can be a great conduit of learning, yet lends itself easily to the sensationalist narratives that entice visitors in large numbers.

The continuous and expanded interest spurred by Caravaggio exhibitions on a global scale has reached somewhat of a culmination in a recent partnership between fashion house, Fendi, and the Borghese Gallery to open the Caravaggio Research Institute, an international research project conceived by Anna Coliva. This initiative,
Coliva explains, “is an international scientific project that seeks to reintroduce within museums the most advanced research to make them producers of culture and not mere producers of blockbuster exhibitions.” To celebrate this launch, the Borghese Gallery, which houses the largest Caravaggio collection, loaned three works to the Getty Museum in Los Angeles: *Boy with the Basket of Fruit* (Figure 26), *Saint Jerome* (Figure 6), and *David with the Head of Goliath* (Figure 1) on view from November 21, 2017-February 18, 2017. The Caravaggio Institute will advance the attribution discourse and become the international primary reference for humanistic and scientific studies on the artist. Through a digital platform, the institute will foster greater accessibility to his entire body of work.

It was unforeseeable that Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, who perished an unpardoned man, would ever receive redemption, not papal, much less divine, but at the hands of historians three-hundred-forty-one years from that hot, wretched day in Porto Ercole on July 18, 1610.

END

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# APPENDIX A

## CARAVAGGIO EXHIBITIONS IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER (1951-2018)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Exhibition</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>April–June, 1951</td>
<td>Palazzo Reale, Milan, Italy</td>
<td><em>Mostra del Caravaggio e dei Caravaggeschi</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February–April 1965</td>
<td>Musée du Louvre, Paris, France</td>
<td><em>Le Caravage et la peinture italienne du XVIIe siècle</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>July 8–September 30,</td>
<td>Palazzo Pitti, Florence, Italy</td>
<td><em>Caravaggio e Caravaggeschi nelle Gallerie di Firenze</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>1970</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 27, 1971–</td>
<td>Cleveland Museum of Art,</td>
<td><em>Caravaggio and His Followers</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>January 2, 1972</td>
<td>Cleveland, Ohio, USA</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 9–April 14,</td>
<td>Metropolitan Museum of Art,</td>
<td><em>The Age of Caravaggio</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>New York, New York, USA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 14–June 30,</td>
<td>Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte,</td>
<td><em>Caravaggio e il suo Tempo</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>Naples, Italy</td>
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<td>May 30–July 18, 1999</td>
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<td>1999</td>
<td>London, England</td>
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<td>1999</td>
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<td>January 23, 2005</td>
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<td>England</td>
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<td>October 2, 2009–January 24, 2010</td>
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