

# *The Birth of Baroque Painting in Italy*

The Italian peninsula was a patchwork of self-governing states with a shared culture and language until 1861, when they were unified and Victor Emmanuel II of Sardinia was crowned king. For example, in the fifteenth century “Italy” comprised some 20 independent political entities. The invasion by King Charles VIII of France in 1494 signaled a half century of war, when France and Spain vied for dominance over various states that were considered prizes for annexation and a bulwark against the Turks. The low point was reached in 1527 with the sack of Rome by the disgruntled troops of Charles V, Holy Roman emperor and king of Spain: Churches and palaces were pillaged and the pope was forced to take refuge in the Castel Sant’Angelo. By the mid sixteenth century, however, greater stability was achieved, particularly with the Peace of Cateau Cambrésis, when France yielded to Habsburg Spain (1559). Thus, by the seventeenth century relatively few powers controlled Italy. Spain ruled the kingdom of Naples, made up of the entire southern half of the peninsula and Sicily, and administered by a viceroy, and also controlled Milan, the capital of Lombardy in the north. In Rome the pope acted as absolutist monarch over the Papal States, a broad swath of territories consolidated from the eighth century onward in central Italy, which stretched from Bologna in the north

to the Roman Campagna in the south. Venice and Genoa enjoyed a relatively stable existence as republics, while dukes held sway over smaller principalities—the Medici in Tuscany, the Este in Ferrara and Modena, the Farnese in Parma, the Gonzaga and their successors in Mantua, and the House of Savoy in the Piedmont.

## **Rome**

Italian Baroque art was centered above all in Rome, which emerged from its doldrums in the last quarter of the sixteenth century. Rejuvenation was the result of renewal within the Catholic Church and a bold public works campaign initiated by Pope Sixtus V (r. 1585–90), who created new streets, brought fresh sources of water, and invested the urbanscape with a modern appearance (FIG. 1.1). What set Rome apart from other capitals was the intensely cosmopolitan nature of its citizenry, who hailed from other regions of Italy as well as of Europe. With opportunities for all classes of people to get rich, and with positive reports of Rome’s revival circulating throughout the Continent, the resident population increased from about 45,000 in 1550 to almost 110,000 in 1600, and finally to 140,000 by 1700. In addition to nobles, lawyers, financiers, scientists, and businessmen, a large number of Rome’s inhabitants were priests, who not only fulfilled their duties within the Church, but also administered the city and the state and

**Caravaggio**, *The Calling of St. Matthew*, 1599–1600.  
(Detail of FIG. 1.32)



1.1 Pope Sixtus V Surrounded by the Churches, Buildings, and Monuments Built or Restored during his Pontificate, 1589. Engraving, 20 $\frac{1}{16}$  x 14" (50.9 x 35.5 cm). Private Collection.

influenced cultural life through their relations with artists, playwrights, and scholars.

Straddling the banks of the Tiber River, Rome thus enjoyed its role as the international city par excellence, a magnet for religious pilgrims seeking indulgences and visiting its seven venerable basilicas. Perhaps as many as 30,000 of these passed through Rome in any given year, while for the Holy Year of 1600 some 500,000 visitors came to experience the city's wonders. Moreover, for an increasing number of tourists and antiquarians the Eternal City offered unparalleled treasures from the ancient, medieval, and Renaissance periods. Artists benefited from a large community in flux, as many travelers wished to take home a devotional work or perhaps a souvenir view of the city (see Giovanni Battista Falda's views, FIGS. 1.2 and 4.3). At the same time, however, an indigent population that desired public welfare also flooded into Rome, seeking the services provided by religious orders and charitable institutions.

Papal influence on the stage of international politics waned during the Baroque, but the pontiffs still maintained relations with Catholic sovereigns throughout Europe, and, as a center of international diplomacy, Rome received ambassadors from far and wide, according them the same privileges as the rulers they represented. The popes were fully aware of the need to underwrite public ceremonies and extravagant monuments to underscore their preeminence. Although the Commune and Senate of Rome had yielded their power to the papacy, the popes invested the resources of the Church in urban revitalization, fully aware of *Roma Sancta's* capability to represent



1.2 Giovanni Battista Falda, *The Church Dedicated to St. Andrew the Apostle of the Novitiate of the Jesuit Fathers on the Quirinal Hill*, from *Il nuovo teatro delle fabbriche et edificij*, 1665–7. Etching, 7 $\frac{1}{8}$  x 13 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (181 x 344 cm). British Library, London.

Catholicism triumphant. For cardinals and nobles, a large palazzo, a prestigious art collection, family portraits, a chapel in a local church, and grandiose banquets were all means of self-promotion, especially for those seeking to elevate themselves within the social hierarchy. Thus Rome shone with a radiance not seen for a long time.

The international character of the city was also reflected in the fact that few of its artists were Roman-born. Most came from elsewhere in Italy, especially the northern provinces, to capitalize on the abundance of commissions, and artists from Spain, Holland, Flanders, and France traveled to the city, hoping to achieve acclaim,



1.3 *Apollo Belvedere*, ca. 120–40. Marble, height 7' 4" (2.2 m). Vatican Museums, Rome.

whether during a temporary sojourn or lifelong residence. Many foreign artists congregated in the region of the northern city portal, the Piazza del Popolo, where papal tax benefits made accommodations more affordable. Young artists arriving on the Roman scene, who sought to better themselves, completed their artistic education by studying the abundant remains of antiquity (FIG. 1.3) and the jewels of the High Renaissance. Rome held her artists in high regard, awarding considerable fees and allowing a lifestyle that in many cases mimicked that of the upper classes. But competition for commissions was fierce nonetheless, with the result that slander, backbiting, and humiliation—even the occasional poisoning or stabbing—were not unusual.

Artistic life in Rome revolved around the Accademia di San Luca, which was founded in 1577 and given, in 1588, the church of Sta. Martina for common devotions and a nearby abandoned granary as meeting space. Instituted as an alternative to the antiquated system of guilds (associations of craftsmen who specialized in particular areas), the academy comprised painters, sculptors, and architects—artisans and dealers were gradually eliminated from its ranks—as well as honorary members such as cardinals, princes, nobles, and literary figures. Its chief function was to raise the professional, social, and intellectual status of its members through various means: to provide a program of sound instruction for young artists that included drawing from the nude and regular lectures by its more renowned Fellows; to create a collection of reception pieces submitted by new members, drawings of the most notable Roman artworks, and casts of ancient statues and reliefs; to assemble a library that would ensure there was a theoretical basis to art production; and to organize periodic art exhibitions so that members' works were seen by the wider public. Membership included both Italian and foreign-born artists, as well as a few women—whose rights were severely restricted largely because it was deemed improper for them to study the nude model.

## Bologna

Although Rome prevailed as the most significant site for art patronage during much of the Italian Baroque, a new pictorial style also developed in Bologna, the chief town in the province of Emilia, whose origins may be traced back to the Etruscan settlement of Felsina. As the second most important city in the Papal States from 1506, Bologna was governed by a legate appointed by the pope. As a result, because it was subordinate to the Vatican, its senate, composed of noble families, wielded relatively little power. On occasion Bologna served as the locus of international activities, such as the coronation by the pope of Charles V as Holy Roman emperor in 1530. Most important, its stimulating, cultivated climate, with an emphasis on



**1.4 Elisabetta Sirani, *Portia Wounding Her Thigh*, 1664.**  
Oil on canvas, 39¾ × 54¾" (101 × 138 cm). Courtesy Sotheby's.

scientific and literary inquiry, was due to the presence of its university, one of the oldest in Europe, founded in the eleventh century.

The spirit of scientific inquiry is best exemplified in the person of Ulisse Aldrovandi (1522–1605), who used his position at the university to study the natural sciences. He founded Bologna's first botanical garden and wrote an encyclopedic catalog of all known animals, plants, and minerals, most of it published posthumously, for which he commissioned several thousand drawings and prints. He was also the author of a book detailing collections of antique sculpture in Rome, *Le statue antiche di Roma*. Another major figure was Aldrovandi's friend, Bishop Gabriele Paleotti (1522–97), who exercised his pastoral duties in the city, not in Rome, at least until 1586, and pressed for reform in Bologna on all levels, including the institution of new religious schools for children, establishment of lay brotherhoods devoted to charitable works, and advancement of education for women. He completed two chapters and a table of contents for a projected five-volume treatise on painting, *Discorso intorno alle immagini sacre e profane*, published in part in 1582, which, although directed at a Bolognese audience, had a great impact on artistic practice throughout the Italian peninsula.

In an effort to elevate the status of painting from that of manual labor to a liberal art, in 1569 the painters of Bologna left the *Società delle Quattro Arti*, a guild comprised of artisans working with leather and steel where they were classed with the shield-makers, to join the *Compagnia dei Bombasari*, and in 1600 they formed a professional organization exclusively for

painters, the *Arte de' Pittori*. Sculpture on the other hand was not a medium widely practiced in Bologna. Having neither a ducal court nor the group of cardinals who comprised a major echelon of patrons in Rome, Bologna witnessed the rise of a new class of clients who included members of the senatorial circle, highly placed clerics, and university scholars. The university also prompted a strong antiquarian tradition among collectors, who sought out ancient sculpture and encouraged historical subjects in painting. Women artists, like Elisabetta Sirani, received exceptional support here (FIG. 1.4), and their considerable output had its corollary in the rise of women authors. The region's claim to artistic excellence, independent of Rome and Florence, was taken up by the writer Count Carlo Cesare Malvasia (1616–93), in his *Felsina Pittrice* (1678), a history of Emilian painting.

### Art for the Counter-Reformation Church

From the 1580s the renewal of the arts in Italy was closely allied with the revival of the Catholic Church during the period called by historians the Counter-Reformation (also, the Catholic Reformation). Hit hard by the Protestant



**1.5 Carlo Maderno, nave and façade of St. Peter's, 1607–26, and Gianlorenzo Bernini, Piazza S. Pietro, 1656–67, Rome.**

Reformation initiated by Martin Luther in 1517 in response to laxity and abuses centered in the Vatican, and smarting from the loss of great numbers of the faithful in northern Europe, the Catholic Church gathered strength and fought back. Beginning in 1545, the Council of Trent, an 18-year series of intermittent meetings of bishops and theologians held primarily in the north Italian town of Trento (Latin: Tridentium), had the purpose of reaffirming basic doctrine and instituting reforms. Whereas the Protestants believed in Christ as the sole mediator between God and man and rejected the clerical hierarchy of Rome, the Catholics reaffirmed the pope's authority through the principle of apostolic succession, whereby the pontiff is considered the heir of St. Peter to whom Christ gave the

keys to the kingdom of Heaven and who he instructed to build his Church on earth (FIG. 1.5). They also stressed the pastoral role of bishops and priests at the local level.

The wide gulf that separated Protestants from Catholics was the result of further doctrinal conflicts. Whereas the northern reformers dismissed the idea of the unique sanctity of the Mass, the Catholics upheld veneration of the Eucharist and the doctrine of transubstantiation, whereby the Host is transformed during the Mass into the body of Christ. The Roman Church also maintained the cult of the saints, insisting on their role as intercessors on behalf of the worshiper, and similarly defended the cult of relics, giving special status to those of early Christian saints (see "A Pantheon of Saints," below). Beatifications and

## A Pantheon of Saints



**1.6 Caravaggio, *The Stigmatization of St. Francis*, ca. 1594–5. Oil on canvas, 36 $\frac{1}{4}$  × 50 $\frac{3}{16}$ " (92 × 128 cm). Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford. The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection Fund.**

Essential to an understanding of Italian Baroque painting is knowledge of the Catholic saints and their role in the Catholic universe. Although Protestants rejected the saints, the Council of Trent reaffirmed their importance in the devotional life of the laity, particularly through the decrees of the Twenty-Fifth Session, which are concerned with the invocation, veneration, and relics of saints, and sacred images. Saints were actual people throughout Church history who through the demonstration of "heroic" virtue were elevated to special status. As such, they constitute a Christian pantheon of archetypes, men and women who stand for different aspects of human behavior. They perform three principal functions. Following the ancient Roman ideal of the *exemplum virtutis*, they offer Catholics models of exemplary behavior in leading the devout life (*imitatio sancti*); they act as intercessors on behalf of the faithful, who may pray to God or the Virgin through a mediating saint; and they are associated with specific human needs, such as St. Roch, who is invoked against the plague.

Authority to grant sainthood, a process that originates with beatification, was given the pope alone during the Counter-Reformation. To the ranks of early Christian and medieval saints

came a new generation of holy figures who had made major contributions during the Tridentine era, most of them missionaries, mystics, and founders of new orders.

In response to the Protestant ban on saints, Catholics produced new publications that corrected and updated their lives, and emphasized mystical experiences over the traditional narrative scenes. St. Francis (ca. 1182–1226), founder of the Franciscan order, epitomizes the renewed efforts of the Church. Popular in art during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, he became even more popular in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, due largely to the new reformed branch of Franciscans,

the Capuchins, established in 1536. His role as *imitator Christi* is apparent in his resemblance to Christ, who inspired his choice of a life of poverty and chastity. The Church downplayed the picturesque events of his biography, such as his preaching to the birds, and focused on miraculous episodes.

Francis did not die a martyr, but the centerpiece of his existence was an analogous event, his stigmatization (from the Greek, to brand) while at prayer on Mount Alverna—the receiving of the marks of Christ's mortal wounds. Caravaggio's painting of this supernatural event was owned by the Roman banker Ottavio Costa (*The Stigmatization of St. Francis*, ca. 1594–5; Fig. 1.6). St. Francis lies on the ground, in the very midst of the stigmatization itself, as is evident from the appearance of the lance wound on his right side; the nail holes have yet to appear on the hands and feet. The comforting angel supporting the saint, derived from Caravaggio's early day-lit pictures of half-length youths, is not common in the pictorial tradition, but does accord with the saint's biographies, like the one by St. Bonaventure and *The Little Flowers of St. Francis*, according to which he was frequently consoled by angels, including prior to his stigmatization.

canonizations became more frequent in the seventeenth century, as the Church moved from its so-called militant phase to its triumphant phase. The two factions also differed on the requirements for salvation; Catholics argued for both faith and good works, Protestants for faith alone (*sola fide*). The Protestants additionally took issue with the sacraments: They rejected five of the Catholic seven (confirmation, penance, marriage, extreme unction, and holy orders), and maintained two, baptism and the Eucharist—the only ones, they argued, established by Christ.

Equally important, the Catholics reaffirmed the use of art for didactic and inspirational purposes, as opposed to the Protestant ban on images in churches on the grounds that they encouraged idolatry. The decrees of the final

session of the Council of Trent (December 1563), “On the Invocation and Veneration of Saints, on the Relics of Saints, and on Sacred Images,” claimed that the honor shown the figures in paintings reverted to the godhead and the saints. The council condemned pictures that represented false doctrines, failed to follow textual sources, or were lascivious by virtue of the incorporation of nude figures—a good example of the latter would be Bronzino’s *Christ in Limbo*, in which the ideally beautiful figures carry an erotic charge (see FIG. 0.12)—and urged the representation of the lives of the saints as moral exemplars and indicated the role of bishops in monitoring art production.

Because the decrees were relatively brief, several writers attempted to set down rules in theoretical tracts. For

## Altars and Altarpieces

Because our present-day experience of Baroque religious art takes place primarily in the museum or the classroom, we can easily forget that such works originally functioned as liturgical objects within a church or as devotional pieces in a private context. For the seventeenth-century artist, one of the most sought-after types of commission was for an altarpiece, most often a painting but sometimes a sculpture. This might be for a high altar in a sanctuary where High Mass is celebrated, in which case the artwork was usually quite large in order to render it visible from the nave, and its subject was derived from the dedication of the church. Alternatively, the commission might be for an altarpiece in a side chapel, as in the instance of the Contarelli Chapel in S. Luigi dei Francesi, Rome, where Caravaggio provided the altarpiece of *St. Matthew and the Angel* and lateral canvases with scenes from the saint’s life (1599–1602; Fig. 1.7). In most basilicas, side chapels were sufficiently separated from the nave to allow for celebration of the Mass or private meditation in a relatively secluded space, as may be seen at the Jesuit church of Il Gesù in Rome (see Figs. 4.7–4.8). Church fathers normally lacked funds for decoration, and so they signed a contract giving rights of patronage for a side chapel to a wealthy benefactor, confraternity, or civic organization. Since the chapels were essentially public spaces, they acted as signs of social status and prestige, not only for the donor but for the artist as well.

An altar may take the form of a table or a block, and its function is to support the books and vessels used during the Mass, as well as the obligatory crucifix. Altars, which have a small relic embedded within or under them, are dedicated either to a saint or a Catholic mystery, usually identified by a small inscription. The front may receive decoration, called the frontal or antependium, such as an embroidered cloth or relief sculpture, like that in Bernini’s Cornaro Chapel representing the Last Supper (see Fig. 3.16). The analogy between the block-altar type and a sarcophagus was exploited when a saint’s relics were placed below the surface.

The Mass celebrated before the altar is the central act of Catholic worship, and its major component is the Eucharist, the symbolic re-enactment of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. The Mass also commemorates the Last Supper, when Christ instituted the Eucharist, giving his disciples the bread, saying “This is my body,” and the wine, saying “This is my blood” (see Barocci’s *The Last Supper*; Fig. 1.15). At the moment of the *elevatio* the celebrant,



1.7 Caravaggio, *The Contarelli Chapel*, 1599–1602. S. Luigi dei Francesi, Rome.

or officiating priest, holds the consecrated Host, a thin wafer of unleavened bread, high above his head for the adoration of the congregation, signaling the process of transubstantiation, whereby the bread and wine have been mystically converted into the body and blood of Christ (the word “Host” comes from the Latin *hostia*, meaning sacrificial victim).

Depending on the dedication of the chapel, the subject of the altarpiece may be either iconic, representing some aspect of Catholic dogma, or a narrative, based on a biblical text or saint’s biography. Correlation with the Mass is evident when the artist portrays the Last Supper or, more directly, the sacrament itself, as in the representations of *The Last Communion of St. Jerome* by both Agostino Carracci (see Fig. 1.26) and Domenichino (see Fig. 2.9).

example, in his *De picturis et imaginibus sacri* (1570), the Flemish theologian Johannes Molanus warned against the dangers of representing nude figures and potentially erotic narratives, and included a catalog of rejected subjects. Paleotti, the bishop of Bologna, and author of *Discorso interno*, also objected to nudity in religious paintings and proposed a list of banned subjects. His objections were clearly aimed at central and north Italian artists who worked according to Mannerist principles as exemplified by Parmigianino, and who, in their desire for originality and an extreme form of beauty, produced religious works that were confusing, overtly sensual, and lacking in emotional warmth (see *Madonna of the Long Neck*; FIG. 0.10). Championing the concept of art as the Bible of the illiterate, and pressing for the didactic function of art, Paleotti stressed the importance of truthful and historically accurate representations. In the architectural field, St. Charles Borromeo, archbishop of Milan, wrote the only book devoted to church buildings and furnishings: *Instructiones fabricae et suppellectilis ecclesiasticae*, which included a short section on altarpieces (begun after 1572, published in 1577).

It is worth summarizing the arguments of the Roman Church in advocating change in holy images. Certain key subjects signifying aspects of Catholic doctrine were recommended for altarpieces and devotional paintings—the Crucifixion, the Virgin Mary, the saints, and the sacraments. In representing these, artists were urged to incorporate four general characteristics: clarity, accuracy, decorum, and emotional accessibility. Regarding

clarity, critics of late sixteenth-century art, particularly of Mannerism, railed against the obscurity produced by works whose primary goal was to produce aesthetic pleasure, with a subsequent loss of religious content; thus, simplicity and directness were recommended as a means of achieving clarity. In demanding accuracy, the writers urged the strict following of biblical texts and accepted pictorial precedents (see “Altars and Altarpieces,” opposite). The issue was most famously addressed in a diatribe by Giovanni Andrea Gilio, author of *Dialogo degli errori e degli abusi de’ pittori* (1564), against Michelangelo’s *Last Judgment* fresco in the Sistine Chapel (see FIG. 0.11), on the grounds that he took liberties with generally accepted ideas regarding the Day of Judgment. The issue of decorum, whereby all details in a painting, such as costume and setting, must be appropriate to the subject, was raised in two well-documented cases. In 1573 the Holy Office brought the painter Paolo Veronese before the Inquisition tribunal over alleged unseemly details (such as an apostle cleaning his teeth with a toothpick) in the painting of *The Last Supper* intended for the refectory of SS. Giovanni e Paolo, Venice (FIG. 1.8; the title was changed to *The Feast in the House of Levi*). And again, Michelangelo’s *Last Judgment* was the object of an attack in *Letters* written by the art critic Pietro Aretino for its alleged voluptuous and licentious portrayal of nude figures (1537, 1545; Gilio made the same criticism). Bishop Paleotti’s dictum that the express purpose of religious imagery was to “incite devotion and sting the heart” suggests a rejection of the altarpieces of the late



1.8 Paolo Veronese, *The Feast in the House of Levi*, 1573. Oil on canvas, 18' 3" × 42' (5.5 × 12.8 m). Accademia, Venice.

sixteenth century in favor of an accessible art that would stimulate the worshiper emotionally, visually, intellectually, and spiritually—a wake-up call that seems indeed to have roused the early Baroque painters. Not only the Church, but also private patrons sensed that in the realm of secular subjects, such as Bronzino's *Allegory with Venus and Cupid* (see FIG. 0.13) central Italian *disegno* had worn out its welcome with its parade of fantastic human figures, abnormal colors, spatial ambiguity, and general departure from verisimilitude.

### Patronage: The Pope and His Cardinals

As the main center of Italian art production, Rome counted among its patrons the nobility, churchmen, businessmen, ambassadors, humanists, and acclaimed visitors. But above all, it was the pope and his relatives who dominated the art scene as they strove to enhance the prestige of the papacy and expand the power of their individual dynasties, goals that were facilitated by ready access to the papal coffers. In the Baroque age the pope functioned in three capacities: as chief of the revived Catholic Church centered in

Rome, as absolutist monarch ruling the Papal States; and as head of his own ambitious family. His seat of power was the Vatican palace, located adjacent to the basilica of St. Peter's, itself built over the apostle's tomb as the most potent symbol of the doctrine of apostolic succession.

The papal court was unique insofar as its courtiers were celibate males. Because the pope lacked an heir, the papacy constituted an elective monarchy: The death of each pope set into motion the selection of a new pontiff from the ranks of the College of Cardinals. Wishing to have trusted associates occupying the chief administrative positions, the popes exploited a system of nepotism whereby *nipoti*—not only nephews, but also brothers, cousins, and intimates—received lucrative offices and benefices, both ecclesiastic and secular. Ideally, two *nipoti* were elevated to the highest rank: One, the cardinal-nephew (*cardinale nipote*), was induced into a life in the Church and became in effect secretary of state overseeing the Papal States, and the other would be married to an aristocratic family in order to perpetuate the line and elevate the family's status. The result was a series of sudden shifts of power at the Vatican, as each new pope surrounded himself with family and friends, as well as local artists from the clan's homestead, all of whom might get rich until the pontiff's death, at which time a quick exit was prudent.

The pope was expected to follow a modest lifestyle and exhibit pious virtue. Thus, in his stead the cardinal-nephew adopted the trappings of secular power, namely, courtly ceremony, reception of ambassadors and dignitaries, palatial residences and villas, titled estates, and an art collection representing the taste and wealth of the family (FIG. 1.9). Cardinals lived in grand palazzos at the center of their own courts, each with a *famiglia* (household) numbering between 100 and 200 persons. Through the purchase of titled fiefs, often from impoverished nobility, and the sponsoring of dynastic marriages, they assimilated themselves as ecclesiastical aristocracy into the ancient baronial aristocracy. Called "princes of the Church," cardinals were expected to live lavishly, sponsoring churches, chapels, and charitable works that would benefit the populace and bring magnificence to Rome. As members of the College of Cardinals, their single major function was the election of the pope, as they had gradually lost their position as policy-makers. The pope alone could grant the red hat, with the maximum number of 70 cardinals fixed in 1585.

### Patronage: Religious Orders and Confraternities

Two further classes of patron deserve mention. Both the new religious orders that flourished during the Counter-Reformation and the lay confraternities devoted to good works were instrumental in commissioning artworks for churches and chapels. Three orders in particular, while different in character and goals, played an active role in



1.9 Guido Reni, *Portrait of Cardinal Roberto Ubaldino, Papal Legate to Bologna*, 1627. Oil on canvas, 77½ × 58¾" (196.8 × 149.2 cm). Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles. Gift of the Ahmanson Foundation.





**1.10 Guercino, *St. Gregory with Sts. Ignatius Loyola and Francis Xavier*, ca. 1625–6. Oil on canvas, 9' 8½" x 6' 11" (2.9 x 2.1 m). National Gallery, London.**

urban communities and developed ways to enhance spiritual growth through images: the Theatines, an order of secular clergy established in 1524 by four members of the Roman branch of the Oratory of Divine Love, including St. Cajetan and Giovanni Pietro Carafa (later Paul IV); the Jesuits, founded in 1534 by Sts. Ignatius Loyola and Francis Xavier (FIG. 1.10); and the Oratorians, another body of secular clergy instituted in 1575 by St. Philip Neri. Their formative years allowed relatively little time or money for large-scale projects, but by 1600 each had a mother church in Rome and houses springing up elsewhere in Europe. Invariably the orders depended on the sponsorship of wealthy benefactors, which often resulted in richly outfitted buildings seemingly at odds with the ascetic rule of the community.

Confraternities also formed an important sector of patronage. In the Baroque age a complex relationship existed between the rich and the poor: while the latter were dependent on the generosity of the former, it was understood that they were themselves the divinely appointed agents of salvation for the wealthy. Thus numerous brotherhoods flourished, primarily composed of lay male

members of the middle or lower classes, although some included women and a few comprised female-only sororities. In line with the Catholic emphasis on faith and good works, members carried out charitable acts that might include medical services, the establishment of orphanages, assistance to prisoners, and burial of the dead. The locus of their communal devotions was a chapel or oratory whose decoration and altarpiece they oversaw.

The subject of private patronage will be addressed later in this chapter in connection with specific collections. Although many of the works discussed in these pages were commissioned, it should be borne in mind that great quantities of pictures were sold by minor artists on the open market, often in stalls or on the street, or directly from the studio (FIG. 1.11). Art exhibitions became increasingly prevalent by the mid seventeenth century, while commercial dealers grew in number, and often combined selling art objects with the sale of luxury items or religious goods, as a wider public sought to purchase small, portable easel paintings.

In exploring the above issues regarding site and patronage, this chapter focuses on the work of five artists. The first, Federico Barocci, represents the transition from Renaissance to Baroque. The other four typify the first generation of Italian Baroque painters: two brothers, Annibale and Agostino Carracci, their cousin Ludovico Carracci, and the best known of the group, Caravaggio. Rejecting the widely practiced formal idiom of Mannerism, these artists looked to more naturalistic sources—Venetian and Lombard models as well as the ideal realms of Correggio and the High Renaissance—to create a visual language that corresponded to the real world, both



**1.11 Simon Guillain, *Picture Seller*, from the *Arti di Bologna* (after Annibale Carracci), 1646. Etching, 10<sup>3</sup>/<sub>8</sub>" x 6<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub>" (26.3 x 15.5 cm). British Museum, London.**

physically and emotionally. The bulk of their commissions came from patrons connected with the reinvigorated Catholic Church, and thus they strove to satisfy Counter-Reformation requirements in the areas of clarity, accessibility, and orthodoxy. Their influence on subsequent generations, into the eighteenth century, marks them as pioneers of a new naturalistic style. Barocci, born circa 1535, worked independently in Urbino and had the longest career of anyone in the group. The Carracci, born just after mid century, were based primarily in Bologna, where they founded an art academy and trained many distinguished painters of the next generation. Caravaggio, whose life unfolded along the length of the Italian peninsula, was the youngest, and his earliest known paintings appeared after the careers of the others were underway.

### Federico Barocci

Born into a family of sculptor-craftsmen, Federico Barocci (ca. 1535–1612) trained in his native town of Urbino in central Italy with the Venetian painter Battista Franco. Eager to establish himself as a major figure in the art world and to profit from study of the High Renaissance masters, Barocci made two trips to Rome, the first in about 1555, and the second in 1560–3, when he worked collaboratively at the Casino of Pius IV in the Vatican gardens. It was there that a disastrous event occurred: his biographer Giovanni Pietro Bellori tells us that envious painters poisoned Barocci's salad, inducing an incurable sickness that affected him for the remainder of his life. Barely able to eat, the artist could work only one hour in the morning and one hour in the evening. He retreated to the isolation of Urbino, where he was closely associated with the court of Francesco Maria II delle Rovere, duke of Urbino, and engaged for the most part in a mail-order business of altarpieces which were sent to churches across the peninsula. Such was his fame that, in addition to numerous ecclesiastical authorities, his patrons included Pope Clement VII, the Habsburg emperor Rudolf II, Duke Francesco I de' Medici of Tuscany, and King Philip II of Spain.

Although Barocci outlived all but one of the artists in this chapter, the fact that he was confidently producing works as early as the 1560s raises the question of whether he belongs in the history of Baroque art. He is included here because he did not follow contemporary *Maniera* models except in some details, and instead sought a high degree of naturalism based on reality tempered by a certain idealization. The evidence lies in his legacy of over 2,000 surviving drawings, a testament to the extreme care that went into his work, from initial compositional sketches to individual studies from nature for heads, hands, and drapery. The biggest impact on his formation came from Correggio, who died about the time that Barocci was born but whose works he may have studied

firsthand in Parma and certainly knew through drawings and prints. Barocci was the earliest painter of his generation to turn to Correggio for pictorial ideas that would render religious subjects more accessible—for example, cropping the image to give a greater impression of immediacy, projecting a sense of the figures' emotional state, and energizing figures and draperies with dramatic movement. A devout Catholic who lived during the final years of the Council of Trent, Barocci was the first major artist to respond to the demands of the Counter-Reformation Church by replacing nudity and eroticism with decorum and emotional stimuli.

The masterpiece of Barocci's first decade of activity is the altarpiece of *The Deposition* commissioned by the merchants' confraternity of Perugia for the chapel of San



1.12 Federico Barocci, *The Deposition*, 1567–9. Oil on canvas, 162 × 91 $\frac{5}{16}$ " (412 × 232 cm). Cathedral, Perugia.

Bernardino in the cathedral (1567–9; FIG. 1.12). This stirring vision of the dead Christ, set on a windswept Golgotha, engages the viewer in the dramatic act of his removal from the cross by Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathaea, who reach forward at the top of the canvas. The youthful John the Evangelist, dressed in red, receives the body from below. Behind him, in an anachronism common to altarpieces, the fifteenth-century St. Bernardino acts as an astonished witness. Barocci adds the intensely emotional vignette of the Virgin collapsing from grief on the ground among female attendants, the so-called Three Marias.

Although the painting shows traces of Mannerist elements, such as the spiraling surface composition and piquant color contrasts, Barocci's figural style, the use of atmosphere and light (in particular the shadow cast

across Christ's torso), and the persuasive movements of the figures are natural and convincing. Raphael's Baglioni *Entombment*, located in Perugia, inspired Barocci's depiction of the struggle to support the heavy body and the emotional response to the Virgin (see FIG. 0.9). But its primary visual source is the work of Correggio, such as the *Lamentation* of 1524–6 for the Del Bono Chapel (see FIG. 0.14), for the powerful sense of drama, the emotional linking of the figures through gesture, and the *sfumato* that softens and idealizes the women's faces.

For the chapel of the Confraternity of the Madonna della Misericordia in Arezzo Barocci created the immense *Madonna del Popolo* in 1575–9 (FIG. 1.13). Native son Giorgio Vasari had already completed the architecture and fresco decoration, but he died before painting the altarpiece; thus Barocci received the job on the advice of the local representative at the Medici court. The original contract for the altarpiece also called for a small tondo placed above the panel (*God the Father*, completing the Trinity with Christ and the dove of the Holy Spirit below).

In the heavenly sphere Barocci shows the Virgin Mary in a dual role, first as Madonna della Misericordia, patron of the confraternity below, which she protects with her cloak, and second as the Madonna Mediatrix, interceding before Christ on behalf of the populace. In the mundane sphere, on the steps of the fraternity's house in the Piazza Grande of Arezzo, members of the city's most prominent charitable group administer alms to the needy, who are characterized in terms of three archetypes: a reclining beggar, a blind hurdy-gurdy player, and a gypsy mother with infant, handed a coin by a curly-haired boy. In the left rear we see figures administering to someone at a window.

Barocci includes a symbolic figural group in the lower left: The mother with two charming children derives from the personification of Charity,



**1.13 Federico Barocci, *Madonna del Popolo*, 1575–9. Oil on panel, 141 $\frac{1}{16}$  × 99 $\frac{1}{4}$ " (359 × 252 cm). Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.**

traditionally shown as a woman suckling two infants, but in response to the Church's insistence on modesty and decorum, the artist clothes her breasts and shifts the action to devotion. The *colori cangianti* (shot or changing colors) of their costumes might appear artificial or decorative in a Mannerist context, but Barocci uses them to model the figures and keep the colors bright. The soft flesh tones also show his innovative and influential use of bluish tints and rosy bloom, based on his practice of drawing with pastels, to simulate blood veins and flushed skin. Reflecting his knowledge of Correggio's dynamic compositions, he unifies the piece by means of the underlying X-shaped composition, the spiral of interlinked gestures and glances, and the pattern of shimmering light and color. Finally, he successfully combines idealized female heads and abstract drapery forms with details of extreme realism, such as the little dog in the lower right who peers out of the painting at the viewer.

The medium of printmaking allowed Barocci to enhance his reputation and secure further income through the dissemination of his compositions in the form of multiple impressions. In addition to sanctioning the reproduction of his designs by other printmakers, including Agostino Carracci, he produced four superb prints, employing etching as the primary technique and adding some engraving and drypoint to broaden the range of silvery grays (for the different media, see "Rembrandt and Netherlandish Print Culture," p. 199). The last of the four, the *Annunciation* (ca. 1582–4; FIG. 1.14), replicates his painted altarpiece for the duke of Urbino's chapel in the basilica of Loreto (now in Rome, Pinacoteca Vaticana). It was still fairly unusual at this time for a renowned painter to make his own prints, and so it is significant that Barocci mastered the medium fully, using parallel, cross-hatched, and stippled lines to create the effect of brilliant light falling from overhead and subtly contrasting textures of different fabrics.

The Annunciation is extremely popular in Catholic art because it celebrates the Virgin Mary as the Mother of God and visualizes in simple terms the doctrine of the Incarnation, according to which the conception took place at the moment of the Annunciation. Barocci follows the biblical narrative by showing the archangel Gabriel, who has just alighted, extending a hand in salutation, while the kneeling Virgin, turning from her reading, raises her hands in a subtle gesture of amazement while maintaining her composure. The dark clouds and streaming celestial rays overhead refer to the imminent arrival of the dove of the Holy Spirit. Barocci includes the traditional accessories: the lilies symbolizing Mary's purity; the open book in which she was reading Isaiah's prophecy, "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son"; and the sewing basket signifying her spinning the wool for the veil of the temple of Jerusalem, which would be split in half upon Christ's death. The mundane world appears in the guise of the slumbering cat, a symbol perhaps of fertility, and



1.14 Federico Barocci, *The Annunciation*, ca. 1582–4. Etching, engraving, and drypoint, 17¼ × 12½" (43.7 × 31.6 cm). British Museum, London.

the emblematic two-towered façade of the ducal palace of Urbino visible through the window, a reminder of the patron of the Loreto altarpiece.

Barocci's *The Last Supper*, a large oil measuring some 9 feet square (1590–9; FIG. 1.15), decorates a lateral wall of the chapel of the Holy Sacrament in Urbino cathedral, which enjoyed the patronage of the duke of Urbino. The composition pays homage to Leonardo's *Last Supper*, in its symmetrical organization, placement of the table parallel to the picture plane, differentiated reactions of the 12 apostles, and classical detailing of the room. At the same time, the genre-like activities of the servants, clearing dishes and serving wine, belong to the north Italian pictorial tradition. Barocci engages us through numerous details that convey a sense of movement and change: the gestures of the foreground figures, who stride through space and glance powerfully toward each other, the fluttering edges of the garments, the spotlighting of pure tones of red and yellow against the monochromatic background, and (again) a dog who glances in our direction. He integrates these jostling elements along the intersecting diagonals of an X-shaped composition, and uses the orthogonals of the



1.15 Federico Barocci, *The Last Supper*, 1590–9. Oil on canvas, 117¾ × 126¾" (299 × 322 cm). Cathedral, Urbino.

one-point system of linear perspective—to which even the angels conform—to carry the spectator's eye from the foreground to the figure of Christ, the central focal point.

Barocci highlights the institution of the Eucharist: by placing the wine and bread at the painting's center, he underscores the importance of the Last Supper as the first Mass. The image thus reinforces the central role of the Eucharist in Catholicism, as well as the doctrine of transubstantiation, according to which the bread and wine are converted into the body and blood of Christ at the moment of consecration. This is in strict opposition to the Protestant point of view, which denies any such transformation. Judas plays a minor role in the drama

as the darkly bearded male of satyrlike physiognomy, dressed in bright yellow, who regards his unsheathed knife ominously.

Barocci was the dominant painter in Italy outside of Venice between the death of Michelangelo in 1564 and the rise of the Carracci in the mid 1580s. By combining *disegno* (skillful figural drawings from life) with *colorito* (a vibrant palette and stunning textural effects) and by maintaining decorum and avoiding the nude body unless strictly required by the subject, he avoided the Church's charge of lasciviousness and answered the call for truly engaging, devotional works. Barocci initiated the flowing, dynamic style that reinvigorated the altarpiece as a thrilling event,

and in the process influenced many Baroque artists, such as the Carracci and Peter Paul Rubens.

### The Carracci

Simultaneous with the career of Barocci in Urbino, another challenge to the *Maniera* and concomitant response to Counter-Reformation requirements for religious art was formulated in Bologna, where three members of the Carracci family, which had its origins in Cremona, banded together to seek a return to naturalism in painting. The Carracci brothers, Annibale (1560–1609) and Agostino (1557–1602), and their cousin Ludovico Carracci (1555–1619), whose biographies were recorded by Malvasia in his *Felsina pittrice*, were aware of their mission as reformers. They traveled widely in order to experience the work of

the great sixteenth-century masters, and collaborated on many of their early works. In 1582 they founded a professional art school, first named the Accademia dei Desiderosi (those desiring to learn) and then the Accademia degli Incamminati (the progressives), which was initially informal in character and later provided a full curriculum of art study.

Unlike the rival Bolognese workshops of Bartolomeo Passarotti (1529–92) and the Fleming Denis Calvaert (ca. 1540–1619), which operated on the traditional master–apprentice system, the Carracci academy placed emphasis on study from nature, which included male and female models, anatomical dissections, and other elements of the natural world. In addition they collected casts of antique sculpture and drawings by Old Masters for the purpose of study. Like Barocci, they worked out their images through a full complement of drawings, from ink compositional



1.16 Ludovico Carracci, *The Annunciation*, ca. 1583–4. Oil on canvas, 82 $\frac{5}{8}$  x 90 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (210 x 230 cm). Pinacoteca Nazionale, Bologna.

sketches to chalk studies of figural details; indeed, several thousand drawings have survived from the three. In addition, the trio shared a keen interest in architecture, geometry, perspective, optics, and literature. They were also fascinated by pictorial riddles consisting of a few strokes that could be interpreted as representing different things, and may have produced the first true caricatures—line drawings that exaggerate for amusing and satirical ends.

### Ludovico Carracci

Despite a short trip to Rome in 1602, Ludovico resided in Bologna, where he headed the Carracci academy and produced a large number of paintings, including many altarpieces for Bolognese churches. Because he was the oldest of the three, he was legally the only one in a position to be the *caposcuola* of the workshop, and he assumed his duties as head of the academy with pride and gusto, delegating commissions and embracing the assistance of pupils. As a teacher, he exerted a profound influence on the next generation of Bolognese artists.

He trained in Bologna under the Mannerist Prospero Fontana (1512–97), but his earliest extant works demonstrate an interest in genre subjects and a strongly realistic approach. Taking an anti-Mannerist stand, he developed into a major force in promoting the dynamic Baroque style practiced by Barocci. Ludovico traveled widely, presumably in the 1570s, to Florence, Parma, Venice, and Mantua, in order to study the masters of the past. His formation, like that of his cousins, depended on the acquisition of a full repertory of visual ideas developed earlier in the sixteenth century, and the manipulation of these according to the requirements of the commission.

Ludovico's early religious works show a combination of naturalism, decorum, and emotional fervor befitting the requirements of the Post-Tridentine Church (the Church after the Council of Trent). For the meeting room of the Compagnia del Santissimo Sacramento in Bologna, he painted his first large-scale religious subject, *The Annunciation*, later transferred to the society's chapel in the new church of San Giorgio in Poggioreale (ca. 1583–4; FIG. 1.16). As in the instance of Barocci's roughly contemporary print of *The Annunciation* (see FIG. 1.14), the altarpiece displays the doctrinal significance of the Incarnation and minimizes the element of confrontation. With a flutter of wings and draped cloth, Gabriel alights in the room as Mary kneels demurely before a *prie-dieu*, with her sewing basket and distaff for spinning at her side. Unlike the master of Urbino, Ludovico included the third element normally present in the scene, the dove of the Holy Spirit, agent of the miraculous impregnation. The dramatic telling of the narrative, combined with the warm, sympathetic portrayal of the protagonists, has the effect of drawing in the viewer.

The one-point system of linear perspective defines the space with precision and simplicity. The heavy application



1.17 Ludovico Carracci, *The Holy Family with St. Francis and Donors*, 1591. Oil on canvas, 88% × 65% (225 × 166 cm). Pinacoteca Civica, Cento.

of paint lends a physical presence to objects represented, further encouraged by the close observation of such details as the still life. Ludovico's indebtedness to Correggio is most evident in sweet, idealized faces and faceted drapery patterns (compare FIG. 0.14). Visible through the window are the leaning towers of Bologna, a localizing detail comparable to the two-towered façade of the ducal palace of Urbino seen in Barocci's version.

In *The Holy Family with St. Francis and Donors* Ludovico employed the iconic tradition of the *sacra conversazione* (holy conversation), in which the enthroned Madonna and Child are surrounded by saints from different periods who meditate or communicate silently with one another (1591; FIG. 1.17). (On the Catholic devotion to the Virgin Mary, see "Singing the Madonna's Praises," p. 46.) The donors, depicted in a subordinate position at lower right as if on the same level as the viewer, were relatives of Giuseppe Piombini, who commissioned the work as the altarpiece for the family chapel and had his name saint, Joseph, included on the right as part of the Holy Family. The church, located in the town of Cento, some 20 miles north of Bologna, was overseen by the Capuchin order, and so

St. Francis appears on the left wearing the patched habit of the reformed Franciscans. Despite the axial placement of the Queen of Heaven, Ludovico introduces a lively asymmetry through the angled postures of the two male saints. The fervent exchange of glances and gestures, echoed by rippling draperies, carries the eye rapidly around the picture, injecting a strongly emotional element in the manner of Correggio (see FIG. 0.14) and Barocci.

A possible second trip to Venice in the early 1590s may have prompted a new interest in Venetian models, evident in the rough and varied application of paint, which leaves the canvas showing through in places, and the intensified color, like the brilliant red swath of Joseph's garment. The bold tenebrism, with highlighted forms emerging from the dark background as if by a flash of lightning, reveals Ludovico's study of Tintoretto and late Titian (compare the latter's *The Death of Actaeon*; FIG. 0.17). The close-up

position of life-size figures and the cropping of the image by the frame give the impression of immediacy, as if the divine personages impinged upon the worshiper's world. The holy figures are presented not as static types but as real people involved in action—even the pair of angels engages in lively discourse. Thus the emphasis is not on ideal beauty, as in Leonardo's *Virgin of the Rocks* (see FIG. 0.7) or refined beauty, as in such Mannerist examples as Parmigianino's *Madonna of the Long Neck* (see FIG. 0.10), but on the naturalism of the group, making the saints accessible, and stimulating the piety of the worshiper.

### Annibale Carracci

Annibale, whose biography was recorded by Malvasia and Bellori, was trained possibly by Passarotti or by his cousin Ludovico, who encouraged him to take a study trip in 1580: first to Parma and Venice, then probably to Florence

## Singing the Madonna's Praises

For the Baroque age, Mary—mother of God, vessel of the Incarnation, and mediatrix between worshiper and the divine—was a subject without parallel for works of religious art due to her presumed role in the salvation of mankind. Within the broad range of personality types that constitute the pantheon of saints, the Virgin offers the most accessible of human traits: maternal love, evident in scenes from the Nativity and of Christ's death. As the object of veneration, the Madonna appears in iconic images, whether enthroned as Queen of Heaven with the Christ child, a type of image popularized in the seventh century, or as the Madonna of Mercy who oversees religious confraternities, or as the essence of virginal purity itself in the Immaculate Conception (see "The Immaculate Conception," p. 148).

Mention of Mary in the Gospels is relatively scant, largely restricted to the beginning and the end of the life of Christ. In particular the Bible does not treat the final days of her life, so that representations of various stages in this particular narrative depend on a literary tradition dating back to fourth-century apocryphal writings. Much of this material was presented in a coherent way by Jacobus da Voragine in *The Golden Legend*, a thirteenth-century compendium of lives of the saints. According to Voragine, in her old age the Virgin longed to be reunited with Christ, with the result that an angel visited her to announce her forthcoming death. Since she desired to see the disciples one last time, they were miraculously transported on clouds to her side from their worldwide missions. At the moment of her death, Christ came down with a bevy of angels to take her soul. Once he had departed, she was truly dead, and the apostles mourned her passing—the scene depicted in Caravaggio's *The Death of the Virgin* (see Fig. 1.34).

After three days Christ came again to reunite the Virgin's corporal remains with her soul, and she was assumed into heaven, leaving only her clothing in the tomb, as represented by Annibale Carracci in his *The Assumption of the Virgin* (ca. 1590; Fig. 1.18). In his depiction Annibale borrowed from Venetian pictorial tradition, in such details as the excited reaction of the apostles, the cloud of angels who bear the Virgin heavenward, and the loose brushwork, which increases the sense of a spontaneous view. Annibale was



**1.18 Annibale Carracci, *The Assumption of the Virgin*, ca. 1590.** Oil on canvas, 51¼ x 38¼" (130 x 97 cm). Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid.

also influenced by Correggio's *Assumption* in the dome of Parma cathedral (1522–30; see Fig. 0.15) in his depiction of the sweet reverie and sense of surrender registered on the face of the Virgin, who seems, like a bird, to fly voluntarily out of the upper limits of the frame.





1.19 Annibale Carracci, *The Bean Eater*, 1583–4. Oil on canvas, 22½ × 26¾" (57 × 68 cm). Galleria Colonna, Rome.

and Urbino, where he may have met Barocci. His earliest paintings and drawings of 1582–3 are marked by a strident realism similar to that in Ludovico's early works. *The Bean Eater* is an astonishing effort as a genre subject (1583–4; FIG. 1.19). A gluttonous country bumpkin dressed in a tattered, feathered straw hat and loosely fitting vest, stares directly at the viewer with open mouth, grasping a spoon in his right hand and tightly holding a crust of bread in the left. Despite the importance of eating as a basic human activity, relatively few works of art actually show a figure partaking of food, much less this typically Baroque desire to depict a split second in time—specifically, the instant in which a figure is about to shovel a spoonful of beans into his mouth. Annibale presents a half-length figure seated in a shallow space behind a table laden with still-life objects that impinge on the viewer's space. Light emerges from the window on the diagonally receding wall to the left. The meal of wine, beans, scallions, and flatbread with greens, identifies the figure as a rural peasant, not a city dweller.

Annibale's brushwork, inspired like that of Ludovico by Venetian technique, calls attention to itself, and the seemingly spontaneous strokes suggest spontaneous movement. His palette is limited, emphasizing somber earthen tones appropriate to this low-class figure. He was familiar with northern Italian genre painting and its Netherlandish sources, such as Joachim Beuckelaer's *The Cook with Christ in the House of Mary and Martha*, which combines a genre subject with still life (see FIG. 0.18). Although he produced relatively few genre paintings, primarily early in his career, the earthiness and direct contact with visual reality remained a major component of his output, whether in classical or religious subjects.

Rejecting the glossy artificiality of Mannerist altarpieces, like Bronzino's *Christ in Limbo* (see FIG. 0.12),



1.20 Annibale Carracci, *Crucifixion with Saints*, 1583. Oil on canvas, 120 × 82¼" (305 × 210 cm). Sta. Maria della Carità, Bologna.

Annibale used this realistic idiom in his first commissioned altarpiece, dated 1583, the *Crucifixion with Saints* for the Machiavelli Chapel in the church of S. Nicolò di San Felice, Bologna (presently in Bologna, Sta. Maria della Carità; FIG. 1.20). This is not a narrative scene of the Crucifixion but a typically Catholic iconic subject that combines the crucifix, emblematic of Christ's sacrifice which is re-enacted before the altar during the Mass, with an assemblage of saints from various centuries. On the left, the twelfth-century Francis of Assisi, recognizable from his brown habit with the knotted cord and the stigmata visible on the feet, kneels in adoration, while the fourteenth-century Capuchin Bernardino of Siena, holding his book of writings, gestures toward Christ. The bearded saint wearing ecclesiastical vestments—a long chasuble over a dalmatic and alb, and a miter on his head—is the fourth-century Petronio, bishop and patron saint of Bologna. An acolyte carries the saint's crozier, or staff; his attribute, a model of the city, complete with its leaning towers, lies at his feet. The city also appears in the background to confirm the immediacy of this redemptive image.

The painting includes two figures mentioned in the Bible (John 19:26) as having stood by the cross during the Crucifixion: On the left, the Virgin Mary looks upward with a disconsolate gesture, while on the far right, John the Evangelist gazes directly at the viewer. The skull at the base of the cross, rendered in striking foreshortening, identifies the site as Golgotha (as indicated in Matthew 27:33; from the Greek, meaning skull), the presumed burial site of Adam, whose fall from grace necessitated Christ's death. According to Christian legend, the wood of the cross was a branch of the tree of knowledge taken by Adam after the expulsion from Paradise. The altarpiece, which is based on a composition engraved by Agostino after Veronese, rejects the ornamental character of contemporary Bolognese painting. Annibale rendered some parts with transparent glazes to depict the quality of reflected light, while in others he used heavy impasto to imitate the texture and weight of surfaces. As in *The Bean Eater*, the figures are drawn with a deliberate coarseness that contrasts with the suave figures of contemporary Mannerist painting. The naturalistically rendered body of Christ is based on a model in the studio, not on prototypes in Renaissance art or antique sculpture. The older generation of Bolognese artists criticized the work for its slapdash execution and lack of artifice and decorum, even though the painter was clearly working within the spirit of the Church's dictates for simplicity, emotional accessibility, and ease of comprehension.

Annibale's work of 1584–8 shows the impact of his study of Correggio, most particularly in *Pietà with Saints*, painted for the high altar of the Capuchin church in Parma (dated 1585; FIG. 1.21). The painting is not a true *pietà* (from the Italian word for pity) used to designate the two-figure composition of the Madonna mourning the dead body of her son, but, like the *Crucifixion with Saints*, the altarpiece is an iconic image that brings together figures from different centuries into a unified whole. The dead Christ, seated on an altarlike sarcophagus, rests against the lap of the Virgin, who has collapsed from grief like the Mary in Barocci's *The Deposition* (see FIG. 1.12). As would be appropriate for a church of the reformed Franciscan order, St. Francis kneels on the left, his attributes of the stigmata, patched habit, and skull clearly visible, as he gazes directly through the picture plane and presents the dead savior to the viewer. Behind him St. Clare, his thirteenth-century contemporary and founder of the order of Poor Clares for women, may be recognized by her attribute, a monstrance (a windowed box containing the consecrated Host) with which she saved the people of Assisi from Saracen attack. On the right the titular saint of the church, Mary Magdalen, identifiable by her streaming hair and ointment jar, and the youthful St. John the Evangelist react with sorrow at the sight. Overhead a glory of angels bears the most significant of the instruments of the Passion: the cross. The activity takes place in front of the tomb, with a hint of



1.21 Annibale Carracci, *Pietà with Saints*, 1585. Oil on canvas, 147¼ × 93¾" (374 × 238 cm). Galleria Nazionale, Parma.

landscape with a rising sun, symbolizing the Resurrection, visible in the distance.

Unlike High Renaissance and Mannerist pictures, which normally bar the imaginative and emotional entry of the worshiper into the pictorial space, the Parma *Pietà* invites the spectator to engage in a profound drama. The painting reveals the influence of Correggio in a manner similar to Barocci's *The Deposition*: the physical linking of the figures through gaze and gesture, the stylized drapery patterns, the somewhat idealized heads of the female figures, and the strong emotional undercurrent all derive from Correggio's *Lamentation* for the Del Bono Chapel (see FIG. 0.14). At the same time, the heavenly vision, with the active, *contrapposto* poses of the angels and their legs dangling through the clouds, takes its cue from the swirl of angels surrounding the Madonna in Correggio's frescoed dome of Parma cathedral (see FIG. 0.15). The rough brushwork of the previous works has given way to smoother modeling, suggesting a soft, sensuous character to the skin and fabrics.

Annibale's work from the mid 1580s to the mid 1590s shows an interest in the Venetian Late Renaissance, as may be seen in his oil painting of *The Assumption of the Virgin* of circa 1590 (taken to Spain some time before the mid seventeenth century; see FIG. 1.18). Subsequently, while retaining elements of Venetian *colorito*, notably expressive color, dynamic figural groups, and broken brushwork, in the 1590s he explored another formal tradition, central Italian

classicism, incorporating the ideals of *disegno* and focusing especially on the masters of the High Renaissance and on ancient sculpture.

This stylistic shift reached its apogee in Rome, where Annibale worked during the remaining years of his career, 1595–1609, executing the extraordinary vault of the Farnese Gallery (1597–1600; FIG. 1.22). The patron, Cardinal Odoardo Farnese, second son of Alessandro



1.22 Annibale Carracci, Farnese Gallery ceiling, 1597–1600. Fresco, ca. 68 × 21' (20.7 × 6.4 m). Palazzo Farnese, Rome.



1.23 Annibale Carracci, *Triumph of Bacchus and Ariadne*, detail of Farnese Gallery ceiling, 1597–1600.

Farnese, duke of Parma and Piacenza, had followed a church career for political reasons while his older brother, Ranuccio, assumed the title of duke and resided in the palace in Parma upon their father's death in 1592. The cardinal, having received the right to live in the family palace in Rome, determined to add new decorations. An ambitious project for which Annibale received limited assistance from his brother Agostino, the vault of the Farnese Gallery consists of some 227 *giornate*, the individual sections of fresh plaster that constitute a day's work. The gallery—the term is used here in the contemporary sense of an architectural space, longitudinal in layout, that is primarily ceremonial in function—was the site of the family's

extraordinary collection of ancient marble sculptures. Measuring 66 feet long and 32 feet high, it is located on the *piano nobile* (principal floor) of one of the largest and most impressive Roman palazzos, completed by Antonio da Sangallo and Michelangelo.

Although the initial impression is one of Mannerist complexity, in fact the main compositional units are simple, consisting of three simulated framed narrative scenes lining the crown of the vault and four feigned easel pictures propped on the cornice at the cardinal points. The scheme is illusionistic, which is to say that the entire vault is frescoed with figures and objects of human scale to give the sense that actual seated youths, satyrs, putti, antique



sculptures, and framed paintings of mythological narratives all exist in the area above the cornice. Light entering the windows along the west wall seemingly penetrates a thin atmospheric veil to cast shadows on the vault and reflect lustrous tones of yellow, green, pink, and blue. The illusion is heightened through many witty details: Satyrs leer directly at the viewer, the sculpted Atlantes seemingly supporting the vault are broken in places, some of the bronze relief medallions and the putti who recline on them are partially covered by the framed paintings, and in a famous detail, a putto pisses into the room. For the most part the feigned decoration lies within the spatial limits of the real vault, and for this reason the illusion is effective

regardless of where one stands or walks within the room. Only at the four corners is the architecture discontinuous, giving the viewer a glimpse of blue sky and clouds beyond a confining balustrade and cavorting putti.

The subject of the feigned paintings and relief sculptures is the loves of the gods, based on Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and other antique literary sources and presented in a tone that is both mocking and good-humored. Annibale may have sought the assistance of the cardinal's librarian, Fulvio Orsini, in devising the elaborate scheme of classical allusions. The large central field represents the *Triumph of Bacchus and Ariadne*, a raucous bacchanalian procession that includes maenads playing a tambourine and cymbals and fauns blowing horns (FIG. 1.23). Four smaller narrative scenes encased in marble frames and bracketed by sculpted muscular figures show the ancient gods and goddesses as the victims of love, hopelessly giving in to erotic desire. The Roman poet Virgil's dictum, *Omnia vincit amor* (Love conquers all) was never more persuasively argued.

That the house of a cardinal of the Roman Church would contain such a profusion of voluptuous images may seem shocking at first, but it should be borne in mind that this was a private commission for the family palace, and that the nudes on the ceiling were an adjunct to the sculpted nudes in the gallery. The cardinal saw himself as an intelligent, sophisticated humanist who, like the heads of other Roman families, participated in the revival of the antique world that continued unfettered from the Renaissance into the Baroque, and who defined himself and his family's wealth and power through works of art.

Annibale clearly followed two High Renaissance models so closely that we can assume he intended an act of homage. From Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel ceiling he derived the motif of framed paintings in an architectural setting, interspersed with bronze medallions, putti, and seated nude males, with the significant difference that he exchanged the sacred subject for a profane one and rejected the nonillusionistic, unattainable ideal for a believable, habitable space. He drew the theme of the loves of the gods and the bulky, idealized figures from Raphael's frescoes in the Loggia di Psiche, located in the Farnese's own villa, the Farnesina, across the Tiber from the palazzo (1518–19). The Atlantes are based on a type of muscular male epitomized by antique sculpture. For the *Triumph of Bacchus and Ariadne* Annibale studied ancient relief sculptures of bacchanalian processions, and incorporated motifs from Titian's paintings of bacchanals, like the *Bacchus and Ariadne* (1520–3; see FIG. 0.16), which could be seen in the Roman collection of Cardinal Pietro Aldobrandini.

Despite their monumental character, Annibale's figures possess a form of naturalism that is different from either Michelangelo's or Raphael's, due to his having filtered his sources through the medium of the model in the studio. Although based conceptually on the male nudes of the Sistine Chapel ceiling, the life drawing of a *Seated*



**1.24 Annibale Carracci, *Seated Ignudo Looking Upward*, ca. 1598–9. Black chalk heightened with white on gray-blue paper, 19½ × 15½" (49.5 × 38.4 cm). Musée du Louvre, Paris.**

*Ignudo Looking Upward* shows that the artist never lost a sense of his roots in the realistic depiction of the natural world (ca. 1598–9; FIG. 1.24). The bold contour line, drawn in black chalk, suggests the latent energy of the body, while delicate white highlights combined with dark hatching describe the play of light and shadow over the skin. Notwithstanding the sensuality of Annibale's figures, he consciously rejected the strained conventions and unhealthy eroticism of the *Maniera* painters, as exemplified by Bronzino's *Allegory with Venus and Cupid* (see FIG. 0.13).

Although the human form was Annibale's principal preoccupation, he also made important contributions to the subject category of landscape. His many surviving landscape drawings, boldly executed, attest to his interest in depicting the features of the outdoor world. In Rome, where northern-born artists like the Fleming Paul Bril (1553/4–1626) and the German Adam Elsheimer (1578–1610) developed a market for views of nature, Annibale produced the first classical landscape, by definition an ideal view that captures nature's timeless, majestic essence in a rigorously structured composition. A classical landscape must also incorporate a historical, biblical, or mythological narrative, usually placed front and center, so that the heroic events of the past may elevate the status of what was usually considered a low subject category.

Commissioned by Cardinal Pietro Aldobrandini to paint a series of six lunettes depicting the life of Christ and Mary for his refurbished palace chapel, Annibale finished two paintings, of which the *Landscape with the Flight*

**1.25 Annibale Carracci, *Landscape with the Flight into Egypt*, before 1603. Oil on canvas, 48 × 90½" (122 × 230 cm). Galleria Doria-Pamphili, Rome.**



into Egypt has attained the status of a paradigm within the genre (before 1603; FIG. 1.25). The landscape mirrors the contemporary Roman Campagna, with a *castello* (medieval castle or fief-town) of the type still visible today, to which Annibale added a Pantheon-like domed rotunda to evoke the grandeur of the ancient world. At the time that the painting was created, the Aldobrandini had staked a claim on the Campagna by acquiring numerous titled properties in an effort to elevate the family's social status.

Like a stage flat, the large dark shape of trees on the left forms a *repoussoir* (from the French, *repousser*, to push back) by establishing the foreground space and creating through contrast the illusion of depth. The pair of trees on the right frames the middle ground. The stable horizontals and verticals of the massive architecture, the foliage, and the figures lend a sense of calm, immutable order to this perfected world and hold in check the zigzagging diagonals of the overlapping hills, which carry the eye into the spacious distance. The subject, from the Gospel of St. Matthew (2:13–15), concerns the flight into Egypt of the Virgin, St. Joseph, and the Christ child in order to escape the massacre of innocent children ordered by King Herod in a vain attempt to slay the king of the Jews. Details within the landscape support the theme: The shepherd with his flock is a reminder of the future Christ as the Good Shepherd, and the oarsman recalls the pagan god Charon, who ferries the dead across the river Styx to the Underworld, an allusion to the death of Christ.

Although he received room and board during the years that he worked in the Palazzo Farnese, for his work on the vault Annibale was paid only 500 *scudi*, a sum so paltry that historians have judged it the cause of a severe depression that increasingly immobilized him in his later years, when he turned work over to his pupils.

### Agostino Carracci

Less well known nowadays than his younger and more famous brother, Agostino Carracci achieved fame in his own time as both painter and printmaker. Recognizing the lucrative benefits of producing prints, he took up the medium in the mid 1570s and opened a print shop in Bologna perhaps in the mid 1580s. Trained by Prospero Fontana and possibly by Passarotti, he played an active role in the Carracci triumvirate as collaborator on numerous decorative cycles. Like Ludovico and Annibale he traveled widely in northern Italy to study earlier sixteenth-century art and to arrange for the creation of reproductive prints, dealing firsthand with such luminaries as Veronese and Tintoretto, who were still working in Venice at the time. With Ludovico overseeing the family workshop, Agostino, like Annibale, was barred from heading a studio in Bologna and essentially had to leave the city in order to define himself as an independent master. Thus he moved to Rome in 1598 to assist Annibale with the Farnese Gallery vault. In 1599, perhaps because of friction with

his brother, he went to work for Ranuccio Farnese at the ducal seat in Parma, executing frescoes in the Palazzo del Giardino. He died there prematurely in 1602.

The most polished and erudite of the Carracci, Agostino played the part of the academician ably, and his painted works are a demonstration of the academy's method. *The Last Communion of St. Jerome* for the Carthusian monastery in Bologna displays the same rejection of Mannerism and comparable devotion to nature of earlier masterworks seen in the other Carracci output (ca. 1594–5; FIG. 1.26). The painting was the product of an extensive design process involving numerous compositional and figural studies. With its occult symmetry, the classical backdrop giving onto a calm landscape, and a suave arrangement of gracefully articulated figures, whose poses and facial expressions suggest various passions of



1.26 Agostino Carracci, *The Last Communion of St. Jerome*, ca. 1594–5. Oil on canvas, 148 × 88¼" (376 × 224 cm). Pinacoteca Nazionale, Bologna.

the soul, the painting reflects the serene monumentality and *disegno* of Raphael's compositions. At the same time, the loose and varied brushwork, the detailed rendering of textures, and the splendid color accents reflect Venetian *colorito*. Agostino makes the holy event an extension of the viewer's space through various devices: his unexpected foreshortening of the heads on the left, the cropping of the edges to imply the presence of unseen peripheral figures, and the random fall of shadows across the forms, all based on observation of the natural world.

St. Jerome was a favored subject during the Catholic Reformation, when the Church revived the great figures of its early history in an attempt to establish precedence over the Protestants. The fourth-century Jerome was revered because of his status as one of the four Latin Fathers who defined Catholic doctrine (the others were Ambrose, Gregory, and Augustine). In Agostino's picture the saint's red drapery refers to the cardinal's robes he traditionally wore in images and thus to his scholarly achievements, especially his translation of the Bible into Latin—the Vulgate, declared by the Council of Trent to be the official Catholic version. Jerome was in fact never a cardinal, since that office was a later creation, but he did spend a period in Rome in the papal administration. Here his nakedness and the skull allude to the ascetic life of his later years in the desert, when he meditated on death and mortified his flesh in an act of penance. The lion at lower right recalls the legend of Jerome's having extracted a thorn from the paw of a lion, who became his constant companion.

According to the medieval writings of the pseudo-Eusebius, before his death Jerome, aged 90, requested to be taken to church to receive the sacrament one last time. Angels appeared as he expired. Agostino shows him surrounded by his disciples dressed in the habit of the Hieronymite order, one of whom commits to paper the saint's last words. The accouterments of the Mass are described clearly: the consecrated wafer held above the paten, the chalice, a crucifix, lit candles, and a censor. The painting thus mirrors the ritual enacted before the altar, while it celebrates such anti-Protestant ideals as sainthood, the central role of the Eucharist, holy orders, and the sacrament of penance.

## Caravaggio

Few Baroque artists had so wide an impact as Michelangelo Merisi, called Caravaggio after his ancestral hometown, some 20 miles east of Milan (1571–1610). His success derived in part from the fact that he was born and trained in northern Italy, where he learned and absorbed the Late Renaissance traditions of Lombardian and Venetian art. He then carried these visual ideas southward, establishing himself in Rome at a time when the *Maniera* painters

were still in favor. Thus he created what appeared to be a new visual idiom based on naturalism that struck Roman contemporaries as astonishingly different from the grand traditions of the sixteenth century.

We know much about Caravaggio's life, thanks to surviving documents and biographies, sometimes derivative and fictionalized, by seven authors: Karel van Mander (1604), Giulio Mancini (ca. 1620), Giovanni Baglione (1642), Francesco Scanelli (1657), Bellori (1672), Joachim von Sandrart (1675), and Francesco Susinno (1724). The artist was born in Milan, where his family was then based. His father worked as a mason for Francesco Sforza, marchese di Caravaggio. Much of the artist's childhood was spent in Milan, and it was there that he was apprenticed to the Bergamesque painter Simone Peterzano for four years. Caravaggio must have traveled to Venice to visit the great artistic sites, possibly in 1588. None of the early works from this period has survived.

Seeking a successful career, he traveled to Rome, aged 21, and arrived there probably in fall 1592. After a few meager years, he entered the studio of Rome's most successful *Maniera* painter, Giuseppe d'Arpino (1568–1640) for about eight months in 1593, during which time he seems to have painted small figural and still-life pieces. His fortunes rose when he received the patronage of one of Rome's most progressive collectors, Cardinal Francesco Maria del Monte, the envoy of the Medici to the papal court, who installed the young artist in the Palazzo Madama from 1595 to 1600 and introduced him to potential patrons. The artist's public commissions for religious works commenced in 1599.


Despite Caravaggio's growing success as an artist, mounting evidence of his unruly and argumentative behavior appears in police records of around 1600. For example, he was accused of attacking the captain of the guards of the Castel Sant'Angelo with his sword in 1601; in 1603 he and two artist friends were sued for libel for circulating scurrilous poems that lampooned the reputation of fellow painter Giovanni Baglione; in 1605 he wounded a notary with his sword over an argument in the Piazza Navona concerning a woman. These incidents culminated in a fight on 28 May 1606 when Caravaggio and a certain Ranuccio Tomassoni, to whom it was rumored he owed money over a wager concerning a tennis game, engaged in a brawl in which the painter killed his opponent with a sword thrust and was himself wounded.

As a result of Tomassoni's death, Caravaggio, assisted by friends in high places, fled southward from Rome, to which, against all hope, he would never return. After hiding out on the Colonna estates, he went to Naples in late 1606, where he completed several paintings. From there he traveled to the island of Malta in 1607, where the knights of St. John admitted him into their military order. An armed fight, followed by incarceration and escape, resulted in his fleeing to Sicily, where he stopped in turn





1.27 Caravaggio, *The Lute Player*, ca. 1595–6. Oil on canvas, 37 x 46 $\frac{7}{8}$ " (94 x 119 cm). State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg.

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at Syracuse, Messina, and Palermo, leaving a trail of commissioned paintings in his wake. Back in Naples in 1609 he was caught by pursuers and badly disfigured. As Cardinal Fernando Gonzaga worked to achieve a pardon for him from Pope Paul V, Caravaggio journeyed by boat to Palo, north of Rome. A victim of mistaken identity, he was arrested and then released, but after attempting to catch a boat that had sailed to Port' Ercole with his possessions, he caught a fever and died a few days later in July 1610, at the age of 39. Compared to other artists of his time, Caravaggio was unusually prone to antisocial and violent behavior, which has led some historians to interpret his work using a psychoanalytical approach.

*The Lute Player* of circa 1595–6 (FIG. 1.27), one of a group of Caravaggio's early Roman paintings that featured one or more adolescent males accompanied by a still life, was created while he was living in the house of Cardinal del Monte, who owned a variant of this work. The canvas was originally in the collection of Vincenzo Giustiniani, a


wealthy banker to the papacy, ennobled in the early seventeenth century, who possessed some 13 paintings by the artist amid a huge collection of around 600 artworks. An erudite connoisseur, he authored essays on art and published his collection of antique statuary in a two-volume illustrated set. The format of the half-length figure positioned close to the picture plane, appearing as an extension of the viewer's space, is typical of Caravaggio's early works. The boy's gaze meets the viewer's, thus creating a psychological bond between the two. The setting is simple: A blank wall, parallel to the picture plane, closes off any extraneous details of the outside world, thus riveting our attention to the objects in the foreground. The day-lit scene is marked by the presence of an unseen light source directed from the upper left, resulting in the smooth modeling that gives a sculptural presence to the figure.

The startlingly realistic depiction, which depends on the close observation of nature and a wide range of local color, astonished contemporaries in Rome. It is generally



1.28 (top) **Caravaggio**, *The Cardsharps*, ca. 1595. Oil on canvas, 36 × 50½" (91.5 × 128.2 cm). Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth.

1.29 (bottom) **Caravaggio**, *The Gypsy Fortuneteller*, ca. 1596–7. Oil on canvas, 39 × 51½" (99 × 131 cm). Musée du Louvre, Paris.

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assumed that Caravaggio painted from life in the studio, although he was working within the conceit of a beautiful youthful type. He rejected both idealizing classicism and artificial Mannerism as stylistic options and embraced the naturalism of his native Lombardy and Venice, where half-length youths playing musical instruments or bearing fruit and flowers had been popular subjects. The painting also reflects his knowledge of the sixteenth-century Northern Renaissance tradition of genre scenes with still life, exemplified by Joachim Beuckelaer's *The Cook with Christ in the House of Mary and Martha* (see FIG. 0.18).

The intent of the painter has been the subject of much discussion by historians. The quasi-antique garb suggests an attempt to evoke the classical world, and the extreme realism of the still-life elements brings to mind Pliny the Elder's description of a contest between the ancient painters Zeuxis and Parrhasio, whose still lifes were so realistically rendered that they fooled the eye. Alternatively, the painting may belong to a class of *vanitas* images that comment subtly on the vanity of earthly pursuits through such devices as the temporary bloom of youth, flowers that will soon wither and die, and the intangible, fleeting pleasure

of music. The boy accompanies himself while singing a madrigal, the lyrics of which typically comprised a sorrowful love poem. Some of the still-life objects resemble male and female genitalia. The youth is one of several seemingly alluring and androgynous figures in Caravaggio's paintings, partially draped or nude. This element, combined with some evidence in the painter's behavior of what today would be termed bisexual or homosexual leanings, raises the question of a possible homoerotic content, but without a conclusive answer.

In addition to the single-figure half lengths, Caravaggio produced multi-figure genre works designed according to a similar format. Two of these, *The Cardsharps* (ca. 1595; FIG. 1.28) and *The Gypsy Fortuneteller* (ca. 1596–7; FIG. 1.29), represent young people in brightly colored contemporary dress and incorporate amusing narratives. Although Renaissance humanistic tradition had designated historical scenes the most eminent and challenging subject category for artists, it is significant that Caravaggio and his patrons eagerly embraced a relatively low subject, genre—loosely defined as a scene from everyday life (the term was not coined until the late eighteenth century). They knew the descriptions of lost Greek genre paintings in Pliny the Elder's *Natural History*, the sole surviving history of ancient art. Both of Caravaggio's works represent a naïve, innocent youth out in the world, who is being duped by one or more confidence tricksters.

Cardinal Paleotti referred to paintings of this type as *pittura ridicole*, moralizing pictures that instruct by "ridiculing" or satirizing human foibles. Our delight derives from the recognition of the trick being perpetrated and the amusing details through which the story is told. The theme of Caravaggio's pictures ultimately derives in part from the parable of the Prodigal Son told by Christ in the New Testament, in particular the scene commonly portrayed in northern sixteenth-century painting, in which the son wastes his patrimony on nefarious activities in the company of charlatans and prostitutes (see "The Parable of the Prodigal Son," p. 185). Here, however, the biblical references are completely absent, and the moralizing element is purely secular.

In *The Cardsharps* three young men occupy a shallow space around a table placed before a neutral background. A still life of a backgammon game projects toward the picture plane. Young men of this type, called *bravi*, wore fancy striped costumes, carried swords, and lived a dangerous life in street gangs—not unlike Caravaggio himself. The viewer can easily sort out the story: The innocent youth on the left is duped by two charlatans, the one in the center signaling to the other on the right, who draws a winning card from his belt. Over 30 copies of the work are known, a testament to its great popularity. Caravaggio evidently based his composition on the sixteenth-century tradition of comparable northern European genre scenes, and their northern Italian offshoots of gamblers and game players.

*The Cardsharps* was purchased from a dealer by Cardinal del Monte, who ultimately owned eight works by the artist. Typical of the worldly cardinals who supported the contemporary art scene, del Monte was a protector of the painters' organization, the Accademia di San Luca. Born in Venice, he had a penchant for north Italian naturalism in painting, having collected Venetian works and promoted the new realism in the Roman art scene. He also owned one of two versions executed by Caravaggio of the comparable scene, *The Gypsy Fortuneteller* (ca. 1593–4; Rome, Pinacoteca Capitolina). The other version was in the collection of the Vittrici family and shows a duplicitous young woman wearing the traditional garment of a gypsy reading the love line on the palm of a sweet but foolish *bravo* dressed in a plumed hat and expensive jacket. Bellori alleged that the origin of the painting lay in Caravaggio's claim that nature was his only source of inspiration, not the sculptures of antiquity, and that as proof of this the artist supposedly took a gypsy passing by on the street to a tavern and posed her before his canvas.

Caravaggio's early genre paintings typically incorporate a still life, an element that he continued to use in both secular and religious scenes throughout his career. No doubt familiar with the still-life paintings produced by Lombard artists, as well as with literary descriptions of antique examples, Caravaggio painted a few independent still lifes, although only one is documented and universally accepted: the *Basket of Fruit* (ca. 1595–1601; FIG. 1.30). Countering the position of art theorists who put still life at the bottom of the subject hierarchy because it lacks the human figure, he claimed that this subject was as difficult to paint as a figural work, and that a now lost still life in the del Monte collection was his finest painting. The apples, pears, figs, and white and purple grapes in the *Basket of Fruit* also appear prominently in other works by the master.



1.30 Caravaggio, *Basket of Fruit*, ca. 1595–1601. Oil on canvas, 12 $\frac{3}{16}$  × 18 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (31 × 47 cm). Pinacoteca Ambrosiana, Milan.

The slight spoiling of the fruit, the wormhole in the apple, and the curling of the dry leaves comprise a trademark of Caravaggio, increasing the sense of verisimilitude and suggesting the passage of time. Since the flat edge of the table is contiguous with the picture plane and the light background contrasts strongly with the silhouetted edges of the objects, the basket and the fruit appear to project into the viewer's space.

Cardinal Federico Borromeo, archbishop of Milan, may have received the *Basket of Fruit* as a gift from his friend and colleague del Monte, or he may have commissioned it himself in Rome. Borromeo was keen on acquiring examples of landscape and still-life painting from northern Europe, where these subjects flourished in the second half of the sixteenth century; for example, he possessed some six still lifes by Jan Brueghel the Elder (1568–1625). Although it may seem inappropriate for a leader of the Counter-Reformation Church to devote himself to art collecting, Borromeo believed that these subjects exemplified the goodness bestowed by God on mankind.

One of Caravaggio's earliest history paintings, *Judith and Holofernes* plunges the viewer into a dark, violent world (ca. 1599; Rome, FIG. 1.31). The work was probably

commissioned by a wealthy banker of Genoese origins, Ottavio Costa, who in his will instructed his heirs not to sell any of the family's Caravaggios, especially this painting. Here the day-lit ambience of the earlier pictures gives way to the tenebrism of Caravaggio's mature style, in which the figures exist in a dark space. The single beam of light from the upper left increases the sculptural solidity and physicality of the figures, and the strong contrast between highlights and dark ground pushes the figures forward. Caravaggio's use of tenebrism reflects his training as a north Italian artist: he was familiar with the darkened spaces portrayed by such artists as Leonardo (see FIG. 0.7), Moretto da Brescia, Tintoretto, and Titian (see FIG. 0.17).

The source of the narrative is the book of *Judith*, one of 14 apocryphal Old Testament books that were omitted from Protestant versions of the Bible but incorporated in the Sixto-Clementine Bible of 1592. It tells the story of how the Jewish heroine, a beautiful widow, saved the Israelites of Bethulia, who had been surrounded by the armies of the Assyrian general Holofernes, by making herself attractive and going out to his tent with her maid-servant, Abra:



1.31 Caravaggio, *Judith and Holofernes*, ca. 1599. Oil on canvas, 57 x 76 $\frac{3}{4}$ " (145 x 195 cm). Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica di Palazzo Barberini, Rome.

And she got up and dressed herself beautifully with all her feminine finery, and her slave went and spread fleeces on the ground for her before Holofernes. . . . So Judith went in and lay down, and Holofernes' mind was amazed at her and his heart was stirred, and he was exceedingly desirous of intimacy with her. . . . And Holofernes was delighted with her, and he drank a very great deal of wine, more than he had ever drunk on one day since he was born. . . . But when evening came on . . . Judith was left alone in the tent, with Holofernes prostrate upon his bed, for he was drenched with wine. . . . And she went up to the rail of the bed, which was at Holofernes' head, and took down from it his scimitar, and went close to the bed and grasped the hair of his head, and said "Give me strength, Lord, God of Israel, today!" And she struck him on the head twice, with all her might, and severed his head from his body. Then she rolled his body off the bed, and pulled the canopy down from the pillars, and after a little while she went out and gave Holofernes' head to her maid, and she put it in her bag of food, and they both went out together as they were accustomed to do, to offer their prayer. (Goodspeed, pp. 156–7)

The Assyrian soldiers were so unnerved by this deed that they released the city and fled.


Judith had a long presence in Western art, beginning as early as the ninth century and figuring prominently in medieval manuscript illuminations as an Old Testament antecedent of the Virgin Mary. In the Italian Renaissance she exemplified the qualities of chastity, truth, and justice. Northern artists, however, emphasized her potent sexuality by portraying her nude. With the Protestant rejection of the Apocrypha, Judith became by default a significant Counter-Reformation figure, conjured up in the name of an aggressive Catholic Church. The primary function of this painting, however, was to tell a grisly story: Caravaggio places the execution in the foreground of the picture space, subordinating the setting to his detailed description of the figures and shocking the viewer with the blood that splatters through the picture plane.

### Public Religious Commissions

The Contarelli Chapel in the French national church of S. Luigi dei Francesi marked Caravaggio's first public commission, received through the assistance of Cardinal del Monte (see FIG. 1.7). The French cardinal Matthieu Cointrel (Italian: Matteo Contarelli) left funds in 1565 for



**1.32 Caravaggio**, *The Calling of St. Matthew*, 1599–1600. Oil on canvas, 126¾ × 133⅞" (322 × 340 cm). Contarelli Chapel, S. Luigi dei Francesi, Rome.

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the family chapel devoted to his name saint, the author of the first Gospel, but little work was carried out in the subsequent decades, except for ceiling frescoes by Caravaggio's master, the Cavaliere d'Arpino (1591–3) and a sculpted altarpiece of poor quality, which was not used. Thus in 1599 Caravaggio received the commission for narrative scenes from the life of St. Matthew that emphasize the specifically Catholic, anti-Protestant subject of sainthood, in addition to the Counter-Reformation themes of conversion, missionary work, and martyrdom (see "A Pantheon of Saints," p. 35). Eschewing the mural technique of fresco, which was standard for chapel decoration, Caravaggio provided large oil paintings on canvas, representing on the left wall *The Calling of St. Matthew* and on the right wall *The Martyrdom of St. Matthew*. In 1602 he was awarded the contract for an altarpiece showing *St. Matthew and the Angel*, but this proved problematic: The church fathers rejected the first of two versions on the grounds that it lacked decorum, with the result that it was purchased by the Marchese Giustiniani for his art collection.

With its large format and numerous full-length figures, *The Calling of St. Matthew* was more ambitious than any of Caravaggio's previous works (1599–1600; FIG. 1.32). The painting exemplifies the artist's ability to invest historical narrative with a sense of the here and now. Christ, arriving



1.33 Caravaggio, *The Entombment of Christ*, ca. 1602–4. Oil on canvas, 118 $\frac{1}{8}$  x 79 $\frac{7}{8}$ " (300 x 203 cm). Pinacoteca Vaticana, Vatican.

with St. Peter at the counting house of the tax collector Matthew, beckons him to be one of the apostles. The disciple, pointing to himself in disbelief, is surrounded by cronies who are only interested in the coins, moneybags, account book, inkwell, and quills on the table. Dressed in contemporary plumed hats and striped jackets and caught up in a life of luxury and avarice, they represent the mundane sphere, whereas Christ and St. Peter are unshod and wear togalike biblical costume. The apparent realism of the scene is emphasized through the seemingly random placement of Christ to the far right and the shadow that falls across the center of his face. As in his earlier works, Caravaggio uses tenebrism to organize the canvas and focus the attention of the viewer on the key figures. The spiritual light that illuminates Matthew is suggested by the single shaft of light that enters from an unseen source on the upper right. The drama resonates in the empty, dusky space overhead.

The painter reused the motifs of the dapper *bravi* and the still life from his earlier day-lit genre scene of *The Cardsharps*, and he employed the same boy as in *The Gypsy Fortuneteller*. He expanded the view to include full-length figures while retaining the limited space and the back wall parallel to the picture plane. Thus he rejected the idealization normally accorded such biblical scenes in Roman sixteenth-century art. As a northern Italian artist, he would have known the Northern Renaissance tradition of representing the subject with the intense realism of a genre scene, emphasizing the vice of avarice through the display of money in the counting house. Unlike his northern predecessors, however, Caravaggio simplified the background and clarified the volumes of the figures. Even so, the startling realism of the work, based on models in the studio, the combination of the sacred and profane, and the elimination of supernatural details were all astonishing in the context of contemporary Roman painting. Aesthetically astute observers recognized Caravaggio as a northern Italian painter who had brought his native traditions to central Italy. The result was nothing less than the reinvigoration of historical narrative painting in Rome.

Caravaggio painted his most conventional and widely accepted image, *The Entombment of Christ*, for the altar of the Vittrici family chapel, the Cappella della Pietà in Sta. Maria in Vallicella, still called the Chiesa Nuova (the New Church) (ca. 1602–4; FIG. 1.33). This was the mother church of the Counter-Reformation order of the Oratorians, founded in 1575 by St. Philip Neri, a friend of the chapel's first patron, Pietro Vittrici, whom the saint had miraculously nursed back to health during a near-fatal illness. Vittrici died in 1600, and it was his nephew and heir Girolamo Vittrici, a member of the papal court and owner of one version of Caravaggio's *The Gypsy Fortuneteller*, who commissioned the *Entombment*. The Oratorians were a congregation of lay priests who did not take religious vows, opting instead to work on behalf of the Church

within the world. Around the turn of the seventeenth century their church, still undergoing completion, was the site of much artistic activity, in which Neri himself had taken a prominent interest up until his death in 1595. When the great Flemish painter Peter Paul Rubens, who was living in Rome, won the commission for the high altar, *The Madonna di Vallicella, St. Gregory the Great, and Saints* (1607–8; see FIG. 8.3), he enthusiastically wrote his patron, the duke of Mantua, about the bustle of activity taking place there. The success of the order was in large part due to its emphasis on a simple approach to religion and its wide range of populist activities, including music, art, and instruction for children.

In a single image Caravaggio alludes to several key moments from the Passion of Christ—the Deposition of the body, the Lamentation, the Pietà, the anointing of the body on the stone of Unction, and the Entombment. St. John the Evangelist, the youngest and most beloved apostle, supports the body of Christ, assisted by a rough, plebian figure identified by Bellori as Nicodemus, who took responsibility for anointing the corpse with myrrh and aloe (John 19:39). The two men lift and expose the sacrificial body in a symbolic gesture that has its analogue in the Mass routinely taking place in front of the altar, specifically during the *elevatio* when the priest displays the newly consecrated Host to worshipers and speaks the words, "This is my body."

Caravaggio includes the three women mentioned by St. John as standing by the cross (19:25): the Virgin Mary, dressed here in a nun's habit, Mary Magdalen in the center with braided hair, who weeps as if to refer to her having washed Christ's feet with her tears, and Mary Cleophas, who raises her hands in an eloquent gesture of grief. Whereas both Raphael and Barocci, according to an earlier pictorial tradition, had shown the Virgin collapsing (see FIGS. 0.9 and 1.12), Caravaggio represents her erect and in control of her emotions, as was advocated by such Counter-Reformation figures as Cardinals Baronio and Borromeo in accordance with scripture.

Caravaggio borrowed the stable composition and the sense of monumentality from Raphael, but he rejected idealized figures and rhetorical gestures in favor of a much greater naturalism, especially in the strong, plebian musculature of both Christ and Nicodemus. Compared with Mannerist examples such as Bronzino's *Christ in Limbo* (see FIG. 0.12) or with Barocci's Correggesque style, the painting is striking in its Lombardian naturalism. The central configuration of a muscular male body carried by athletic males ultimately derives from the antique convention for portraying a hero or hunter carried from the field. Caravaggio's insistent tenebrism clarifies the devotional content and imparts a measure of emotional intensity. The bent left arm of Nicodemus, his bold gaze toward the viewer, and the diagonally projecting stone all break through the picture plane, drawing the viewer into the

fictive space. A triumph of Post-Tridentine art, the painting possesses the very elements stipulated by the Church: clarity, accuracy, decorum, and a stimulus to devotion.

In 1601 Laerzio Cherubini, an eminent lawyer active in Roman government, commissioned a large painting, 12 feet in height, of *The Death of the Virgin* for his family chapel, dedicated to the *Transitus* or Dormition of the Virgin (her passage from life to the afterlife), in Sta. Maria della Scala in the lower-class quarter of Trastevere (ca. 1602–4; FIG. 1.34). This was the new Roman church of the Counter-Reformation order of Discalced Carmelites, founded by St. Teresa of Ávila. The date of the painting's execution

is uncertain; scholars have proposed several possibilities between the time of the contract up to 1604, on the basis of the accomplished style of the piece. The subject celebrates the Catholic cult of the Virgin and emphasizes her earthly, human character (see "Singing the Madonna's Praises," p. 46).

Traditionally in such a scene a beautiful Madonna is shown propped up in bed, with angels or a heavenly radiance providing an optimistic note. Caravaggio, however, in keeping with his realistic style and the Church's dictum that art should "sting the heart and incite devotion," consciously rejected High Renaissance and Mannerist idealization, as shown in Parmigianino's

*Madonna of the Long Neck* (see FIG. 0.10), thus portraying her mortal remains laid out on a simple wooden bier before being carried to the sepulcher, her bare feet extending ignobly. He shows the moment after Christ, with a glory of angels, has departed with Mary's soul (see "Singing the Madonna's Praises," p. 46). The men, whose heads and hands emerge from the tenebrosic gloom, mourn their loss in a variety of ways, from weeping and emotional outburst to calm, stoic resignation.

In the lower right the painter included an unusual detail: the seated figure of St. Mary Magdalen, dressed, unlike the apostles, in contemporary clothes and bent from grief. During the Counter-Reformation these two women represented distinct opposites: The Virgin stood for chastity and purity, while the Magdalen, the sole woman among the band of Christ's disciples, represented the archetype of the penitent female (see "From Sinner to Saint: Mary Magdalen," p. 76). Her presence here may reflect the patronage of both Cherubini and the church fathers on behalf of the Casa Pia, a local charitable institution devoted to the rescue of wayward and battered women.



**1.34** Caravaggio, *The Death of the Virgin*, ca. 1602–4. Oil on canvas, 145¼ × 96½" (369 × 245 cm). Musée du Louvre, Paris.



Such a degree of physical and emotional frankness had negative consequences. The painting was the subject of severe criticism, and ultimately the fathers of the order replaced it with a more decorous altarpiece by an artist of lesser stature. As in the instance of the rejected first version of the *St. Matthew* altarpiece, there was a private collector waiting in the wings: Vincenzo I Gonzaga, duke of Mantua, acquired the painting through the intermediary of his court artist Rubens, who arranged for the crating of Caravaggio's painting for shipment after it was exhibited in Rome for one week in 1607.

After the murder of Tommasoni in 1606, Caravaggio continued to receive commissions for both private and public works during his flight southward. One of the largest of these commissions (13 feet in height) was the altarpiece, *The Seven Acts of Mercy*, for the new church of the Pio Monte della Misericordia in Naples, a charitable institution founded by seven young nobles in 1601 (1606; FIG. 1.35). Like Barocci's *Madonna del Popolo* (see FIG. 1.13) the subject focuses on two specifically Catholic and non-Protestant subjects: the Virgin Mary and the corporal works of mercy. For Catholics both faith and good works provided a route to salvation, whereas the Protestants rejected the latter and believed in faith alone. In the upper region two youthful angels transport the Madonna della Misericordia, or Madonna of Mercy, holding the Christ child, to the mundane world of a summarily drawn Neapolitan street scene, where she oversees the performing of charitable deeds for the needy. These deeds are based on the scriptural source in the Gospel of St. Matthew (26:34–46), in which Christ indicates who, upon the Day of Judgment, shall be worthy of the kingdom of Heaven.

Caravaggio's approach is unusual in his depiction of all seven acts in one painting, combining in a confusing and overlapping way both historical and contemporary figures. The Old Testament hero Samson drinks from the jawbone of an ass (giving drink to the thirsty), an innkeeper welcomes a pilgrim who may be Christ in disguise, along with a partially hidden companion (harboring the harborless), the fourth-century St. Martin of Tours divides his cloak for a naked beggar (clothing the naked), a shadowed figure crouches at the lower left (visiting the sick), two men, one an ecclesiastic, carry a corpse, whose bare feet are visible (burying the dead), and a woman succors her elderly father, who pokes his head through iron bars (feeding the hungry and visiting the captive). The last vignette comes from an ancient literary theme, the *Caritas Romana* (Roman Charity) described by Valerius Maximus in his *Memorable Acts and Sayings of the Ancient Romans* of circa 30 CE, which tells of how a daughter, Pero, in an act of filial piety, sustained her imprisoned father Cimon by breastfeeding him.

The painting contains elements of the artist's so-called late style. It was painted rapidly, with the brushwork more visible, especially in the streaks of paint representing



1.35 Caravaggio, *The Seven Acts of Mercy*, 1606. Oil on canvas, 153½ × 102¾" (390 × 260 cm). Pio Monte della Misericordia, Naples.

drapery folds. The figures are not smoothly modeled, but the overall impression is more atmospheric, and the brownish ground of the canvas, representing shadowy areas, shows through in places.

By 1620 the five artists considered in this chapter were all deceased. Their impact, however, was widespread and long lasting. Through the dissemination of Barocci's paintings and prints across Italy, his renewal of Correggio's dynamism and his respect for Tridentine rules offered an alternative to Mannerism. The Carracci academy trained a new generation of artists that continued the synthetic tradition of Bolognese painting, while the classical style of Annibale in Rome had a measurable impact on artists working there. And Caravaggio's stark realism inspired not only Italian artists but also many from northern Europe and Spain, who came to Rome and Naples. The legacy of these painters looms large in the story of the Baroque period.