

# Caravaggio

Humanities Seminars

Spring 2021

5 weeks, 2 hour classes

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“This is the great Michelangelo Caravaggio, an awe-inspiring painter, the marvel of art, the miracle of nature.” Giulio Cesare Gigli, 1615

“Caravaggio came into the world to destroy painting.” Nicolas Poussin, 1640s

## About this course:

As these quotations illustrate, Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1571-1610) was both a beloved and rejected painter of the Baroque era. His paintings, which often included realistic figures, theatrical lighting, and dark, obscure settings activated a deep sense of spiritual contemplation for many. Yet he was also critiqued for depicting shocking subjects and eschewing traditional painting standards. Much has been made of his dramatic biography, which includes a lengthy arrest record, a murder, and a death in exile.

Throughout this course we will examine Caravaggio’s development and working methods in the context of his own time, exploring his influences, innovations, and commissions. We will also consider his biography and think critically about the way it has been retold over the years in relation to his artwork. The course will end with an examination of his legacy and the ways his methods impacted other artists’ works.

## By the end of this course you should be able to:

- Situate Caravaggio’s paintings within their historical context
- Consider how Caravaggio’s biography has influenced interpretations of his work
- Identify and articulate the stylistic elements of Caravaggio’s paintings
- Discuss the artist’s legacy and the caravaggisti

## Readings:

Readings will be assigned for all classes and should be read in advance of the class session. There are no textbooks to buy. All required readings will be posted online.

## Tentative Schedule

Week 1: Caravaggio’s early life and secular works; historical context

Week 2: The artist in Rome: Spiritual subjects in the Contarelli and Cerasi Chapels

Week 3: The artist in Rome: Private commissions

Week 4: The artist on the run: Naples and Malta

Week 5: Caravaggio's legacy and the caravaggisti

**Tentative Reading List:**

Baxandall, Michael. "The Period Eye." *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974.

Mahon, Denis. "Caravaggio's Death: A New Document," *Burlington Magazine* 93 (1951): 202.

Moffitt, John F. *Caravaggio in Context: Learned Naturalism and Renaissance Humanism*. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2004.

Pericolo, Lorenzo and David M. Stone. *Caravaggio: Reflections and Refractions: Visual Culture in Early Modernity*. Burlington: Ashgate, 2014.

Posner, Donald. "Caravaggio's Homo-Erotic Early Works." *Art Quarterly*. 34 (1971): 301-324.

Puglisi, Catherine. *Caravaggio*. London: Phaidon, 1998.

Sohm, Philip. "Caravaggio's Deaths." *The Art Bulletin*. 84 (2002): 449-468.

Warwick, Genevieve. *Caravaggio: Realism, Rebellion, Reception*. Newark: University of Delaware, 2006.