

NATIONAL MUSEUM

**XVII CENTURY  
MASTERS**

MALTA

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## CATALOGUE

### Room I

#### SALVATOR ROSA (?)

Born in Arenella (Naples) in 1615 and died in 1673; much influenced by Ribera. He was in Rome more than once and in Florence in 1640. He painted historical, biblical and sacred subjects and excelled as a landscape painter. His self-portrait hangs in the National Gallery, London.

#### 1. Landscape with figures

Canvas, 55 in. x 72 in.

The picture represents bandits in a landscape assailing men on horseback. The work is beyond any doubt within the close orbit of the Neapolitan master; but before it is carefully studied in every detail, a definite attribution cannot be given safely.

#### MATTIA PRETI— called Il Cavalier Calabrese.

Born in Taverna, Calabria in 1613 and studied in Naples and Rome. Much influenced by Guercino but especially by the sixteenth-century Venetian masters and Caravaggio. From 1661 until his death in 1699 he spent practically all his time in Malta where he produced numerous altar-pieces and other pictures. Amongst the best works by the Calabrese in Malta we should mention the large bozzetto with the "Martyrdom of St. Catherine" in the Magisterial Palace, Valletta, the lunette with the "Nativity of the Virgin" in St. John's and the "St. Andrew" in the Żurrieq Church.

## 2. Lot and his daughters

Canvas, 65 in. x 75 in.

A work still influenced by the sixteenth-century Venetian masters especially by Veronese. Of special interest is the **fantastic** rendering of Sodom in flames on the extreme left, and the freely handled small figure of Lot's wife.

## 3. Judith showing the head of Holofernes to the Bethulians

Canvas, 71 in. x 92 in.

As a composition, it is not one of the happiest by Preti, yet it contains some bold details such as the figure near the High Priest on the extreme left and the two magnificent heads behind him.

## 4. St. Bartholomew

Canvas, 30½ in x 25 in.

One of the many half figures so dear to the master, boldly drawn and executed.

## 5. The Baptism of Christ

Canvas, 57 in. x 78 in.

A pyramidal composition formed by the two broadly designed figures on the foreground against a beautiful sky reminiscent of Veronese. Unfortunately, the cloud on the upper left has suffered through time and mishandling. The treatment of the subject is akin to that in the vault of St. John's Cathedral, Valletta.

## 6. The Incredulity of St. Thomas

Canvas, 52 in. x 69 in.

A companion picture to the preceding and a work of high quality. The head of the old man behind the figure of Christ recalls Tintoretto and Marescalco; the way the forehead is treated is not unworthy of an early Rembrandt.

## 7. Zacharias

Canvas, 40¼ in. x 29½ in.

The old patriarch is depicted in the act of offering incense to the Almighty. The painter in this picture aims at high sculptural effects.

## ITALIAN SCHOOL

### 8. Cain and Abel

Canvas, 80 in. x 65 in.

In the old inventories this painting was ascribed to Caravaggio; later it was given to the Neapolitan School. Before the canvas is thoroughly cleaned and stripped of the superimposed coloured varnishes, no final judgment can be given about it.

As far as can be seen from its present state, the work seems to be of unequal merit displaying, as it does, vigour in the lying figure of Abel and weakness in the torso of the figure of Cain. What looks full of promise in the picture is the landscape, which may well be a decisive factor in the final attribution, after the canvas is cleaned.

One thing is certain, however, even looking at the work in its present state, and that is that the picture is certainly not by Caravaggio.

## JUSEPE DE RIBERA – called Lo Spagnoletto

Born at Jatiba in Spain in 1589. He studied in Valencia under Francisco Ribalta but was strongly influenced by Caravaggio in Italy. He became a member of the Academy of St. Luke at Rome in 1630 and died in Naples in 1652.

9. St. Francis de Paule

Canvas, 30 in. x 24½ in.

A magnificent work full of nobility of invention and boldness of execution. The head and hands are wonderfully modelled and carried out with freedom and ease. The figure in its sense of realism may well be a portrait. The painting is signed in monogram.

NEAPOLITAN SCHOOL

10. Man in Contemplation

Canvas, 28¼ in. x 21¼ in.

The picture has been described in the past as St. Peter and it may well represent the Apostle weeping over his denial of Christ.

Attributed to Guido Reni in the past, the work has no connection at all with the classicist leanings of the Bolognese master. It is certainly by a Neapolitan painter in the circle of Ribera and most probably by Luca Giordano in his early period.

## Room II

### NEAPOLITAN SCHOOL

#### 11. Still life.

Canvas, 49 in. x 68 in.

A composition showing the keen interest of the artist in the various inanimate objects represented. Pictorially, amongst the best rendered objects are the copper utensils.

### ANDREA VACCARO

Born in Naples in 1598 where he studied under Girolamo Imparato; he was much influenced, however, by Massimo Stanzione, a major figure in the art world in Naples.

For quite a long period after Stanzione's death, Vaccaro enjoyed a high popularity in his native town, where he died in 1670.

#### 12. Salome receiving the head of St. John the Baptist.

Canvas, 48½ in. x 69½ in.

A composition constructed on straight lines. The theatricality of the pose of the executioner contrasts with the gentle melancholic calm of Salome who turns her head while holding the salver to receive the gruesome trophy. The head of St. John is boldly painted as is the female figure on the extreme left whose left hand especially is a fine piece of draughtsmanship. Benedict Nicholson says about this work: "Indeed, far from reminding one of the Neapolitan School, it has more in common with the Netherlandish masters of the middle years of the seventeenth-century".

The picture bears the monogram of the master: A V intertwined.

## SICILIAN SCHOOL

### 13. Madonna, the Infant St. John and the sleeping Child.

Canvas, 59¼ in. x 67¼ in.

A work where the traditional South Italian style tries to blend with Flemish art modes of the period. The lying baby which looks almost like a plaster cast foreshadows the putti of Giacomo Serpotta.

## MATHIAS STOMER

He was born round 1600 probably in Brussels and he spent most of his life in Italy where he may have met Gerard Honthorst. Not very much is known about this master whose works are found in considerable number in Naples, Palermo, Messina and other towns of Sicily where the painter is believed to have died in 1650.

### 14. Lament over the dead Abel

Canvas, 58¼ in. x 81 in.

A painting strongly influenced by the Italian masters, especially in the treatment of the landscape which adds to the pathos of the scene.

### 15. The Beheading of St. John the Baptist

Canvas, 57½ in. x 77½ in.

A realistic performance of a grim subject so dear to the European masters of the period. The blue vestment of the young lady holding the salver, echoed on the band round the leg of the prison warder, lends a rich note to the symphony of brownish tones.



16. Biblical scene

Canvas, 57½ in. x 71 in.

Most probably the painting depicts the parable of the good Samaritan as the way the scene is expressed corresponds to the description given in certain versions of the Bible published in the North. Here, besides the influence of Honthorst, we feel that of the Italian masters in the cleverly constructed pyramidal group

17. The Death of Cato

Canvas, 57¼ in. x 76 in.

An impressive rendering of this theme of which other versions exist. The work betrays clearly the influence of Honthorst especially in the group on the right, all imbued with light.

NETHERLANDISH MASTER

18. St. Jerome

Canvas, 41½ in. x 32 in.

A picture by a painter influenced by Koeninck.

CARLO MARATTA

Born in Rome in 1725 where he left most of his best works. Though in some ways he is connected with the classic movement of which one of the chief exponents was his master Sacchi, in many other ways he shares the baroque tendencies of the period. Maratta is often a very good colourist as is shown by the altarpiece with the "Madonna enthroned" recently exhibited at the Palazzo delle Esposizioni in Rome, executed by the master for Santa Maria del Popolo.

Maratta was appointed superintendent of the Vatican Chambers by Pope Innocent XI and Court Painter by Louis XIV of France. He died in Rome in 1713.

19. Madonna and Child with the Infant St. John

Canvas, 58 in. x 44 in.

One of various versions of this composition which Maratta repeated with slight variations. Both from a chromatic point of view as well as a specimen of draughtsmanship the work is of quite a high quality. The agitated draperies contrast with the smooth treatment of the uncovered limbs.

**J. A. CAUCHI**

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