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IMPLICIT DECONTEXTUALIZATION

Visual Discourse of Religious Paintings in Roman Collections circa 1600

As early as 1991, Victor Stoichita noted that no one has yet written a history and ontology of sacred pictures in profane contexts in the early modern period.¹ Now, some two decades later, the situation has changed little regarding the category of religious pictures painted specifically for collectors, the subject of this essay. To approach this complex problem, a great number of historical and ontological parameters need to be considered, many of which are open questions: there is little evidence regarding the reception of religious paintings executed for private collections, and only in very rare cases do any directives given to artists for producing works for private collections survive. It can be argued that questions of taste play a different and perhaps greater role in private collections than in other contexts, and “private” meant something very different in the early modern period from what it means today.² Furthermore, not every work found among a collector’s possessions should be classified as a “picture for a collector”; some might have been intended to stimulate private devotion. Those works could once have been kept in a bedroom. At a later stage, however, they might have been transferred to another location in the building specifically designed to keep “pictures for a collector.” Thus, they might have lost their original meaning. Furthermore, the important aspect of decorum, which regulated a painting’s mode of composition in relationship to its subject, site of display, and conditions of reception, was a genuinely open question. During the early modern period, decorum covered a wide range and could be partially contradictory. For example, the dignity of a person depicted might have suggested a certain mode of visual representation. Yet, in order to move the beholder through aesthetic novelty, the painter might have employed another mode, one that broke representational conventions.³ Even if a theory of the religious picture for the collector had been formulated in this period, it would provide clues to understanding the paintings but not definitive answers. After all, it is a basic characteristic of the genre of normative theories that they do not precisely reflect “reality.” In short, it is difficult to historicize our glimpse of religious paintings produced for private collections in order to reconstruct the norms, the modes of viewing, and the value standards that were applied to them. Probably the best we can do is to lower our sights and focus our interest. In this essay, I consider the situation in Rome around 1600 in the circle of Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio.⁴

In Rome, the boom in collections consisting primarily of transportable paintings began around 1600, relatively late compared with Venice and other northern Italian cities. Caravaggio, in particular, oriented his production of paintings toward the

conditions of this new market. This essay examines two different forms of religious paintings in collections: first, those created for a sacred space and subsequently transferred into a private collection; second, those conceived from the outset for a specific collection. The first type, which demonstrates the often-treated phenomenon of the decontextualization of religious pictures, is encountered frequently with Caravaggio and his circle. There is much more evidence documenting the reception of such decontextualized works than of religious works conceived initially for collections; consequently, the latter group has received far less scholarly attention.

Caravaggio's "Capriccio," Lucio Massari's *Saint Matthew and the Angel*, and Cecco del Caravaggio's *Resurrection*

Several of Caravaggio's altarpieces did not remain on-site but were transferred to private collections. Recent research has cast doubt on the long-held view that the primary reason these works were rejected for sacred spaces was lack of decorum.⁵ In order to reconstruct the semantics of the category of decorum for paintings originally intended for collections, we must examine this situation more closely. Here, for the sake of brevity, I adduce less-well-known examples that point to a new perspective. The five altar paintings that Caravaggio created in Rome are well known. Three were not kept by the congregations in question and ended up in private collections: *The Death of the Virgin* (fig. 1), commissioned for Santa Maria della Scala in Rome, which the Duke of Mantua acquired through Rubens's mediation and which the duke later sold to King Charles I of England; the first altar painting for the Contarelli Chapel in the church of San Luigi dei Francesi in Rome, *Saint Matthew and the Angel* (fig. 2), purchased by Vincenzo Giustiniani; and the *Madonna and Child with Saint Anne (Madonna dei Palafrenieri)* (1605–6), painted for the altar of the Palafrenieri in Saint Peter's Cathedral, which Cardinal Scipione Borghese bought from the confraternity of the Palafrenieri. Two other Caravaggio altarpieces remained on-site in Roman churches: *Madonna of Loreto (Madonna dei Pellegrini)* (1605–6) in Sant'Agostino⁶ and *The Entombment of Christ* (1602–3) in the Chiesa Nuova (the original painting is now in the Vatican Pinacoteca; a copy is in the church).

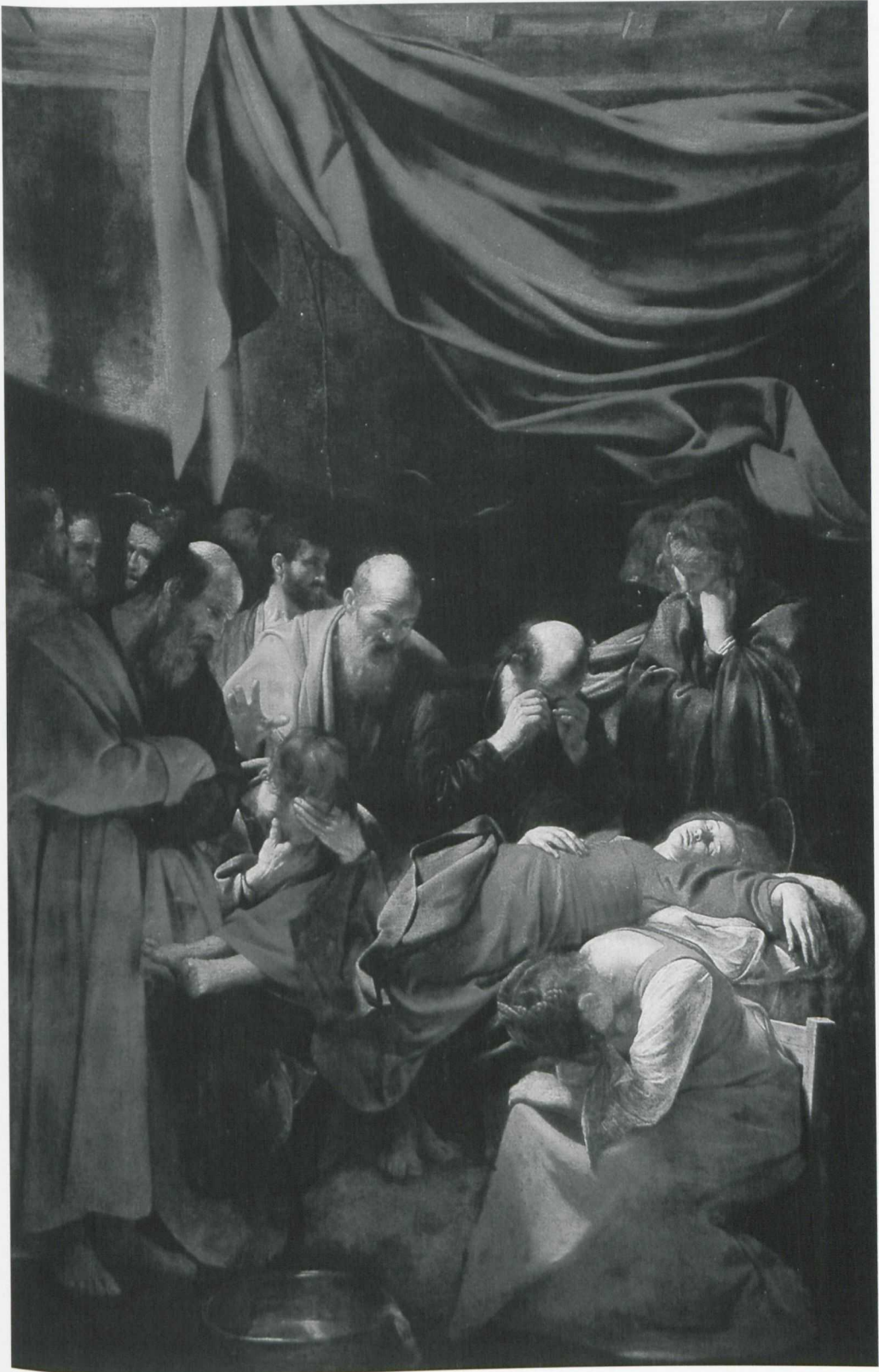
There was probably a sixth Roman altar painting, a Trinity that apparently had a trajectory similar to those of the first three pictures listed above. As Roberto Cannatà and Herwarth Röttgen have shown, Caravaggio received a commission for the Trinity from the priesthood of the church of Santissima Trinità dei Pellegrini in 1602, but the painting did not remain there.⁷ No extant documents shed light on why the picture was removed from the church, but a description of a painting with the same subject in Cardinal Scipione Borghese's inventory of 1650, which was presumably identical to the altarpiece for the Santissima Trinità dei Pellegrini, attests to "[a painting] of an old man and a youth with a dove below... a capriccio by Caravaggio, with which he intended to express the Trinity."⁸

That the painting owned by Scipione Borghese was indeed the altarpiece created for the Santissima Trinità dei Pellegrini is conjectural but very plausible, for two reasons: (1) the subject is an unusual one that Caravaggio would have been

Fig. 1.

Michelangelo Merisi
da Caravaggio
(Italian, 1571–1610)

The Death of the Virgin, 1605,
oil on canvas, 369 × 245 cm
(145¼ × 96½ in.)
Paris, Musée du Louvre



**Fig. 2.**

Michelangelo Merisi
da Caravaggio
(Italian, 1571–1610)

Saint Matthew and the Angel,
1602, oil on canvas,
223 × 183 cm (87¾ × 72 in.)
Destroyed in 1945

Fig. 3.

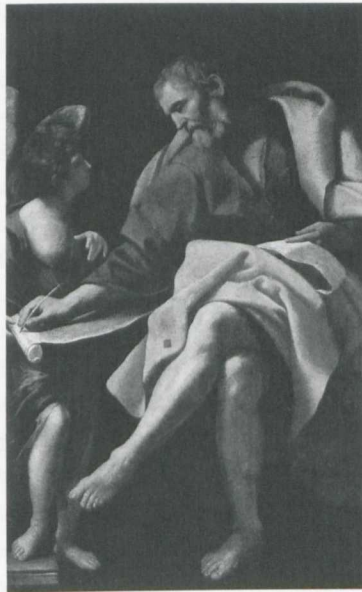
Lucio Massari
(Italian, 1569–1633)

Saint Matthew and the Angel,
ca. 1610, oil on canvas,
240 × 160 cm (94½ × 63 in.)
Rome, Santa Maria della
Concezione

unlikely to depict twice and (2) Scipione Borghese purchased Caravaggio's rejected *Madonna and Child with Saint Anne* as well as an altarpiece by Cecco that structurally resembles Caravaggio's Trinity.⁹ If this conjecture is accurate, then the description in the inventory says much about the composition of this sixth altarpiece: that, in his "capriccio" (a word that connotes an erratic or even capricious invention), Caravaggio "intended" to depict the Trinity—as if the inventory-taker had some doubt that the artist had succeeded. This touches upon the core question about the transferred altar paintings: Why were they rejected? That question indirectly relates to the issue of their reception in the collections, and it has become a controversial topic in recent decades.

Older scholarship never doubted that reasons of decorum led to the rejection of the paintings. However, Luigi Spezzaferro questioned the noncontemporaneous reports of Giovanni Pietro Bellori and Filippo Baldinucci regarding the inadequate decorum of Caravaggio's first altar painting for the Contarelli Chapel and asserted additional, primarily external, reasons to account for the transfer of rejected paintings into collections.¹⁰ Other authors, such as Creighton Gilbert, agreed that the presumed lack of decorum was not responsible for the rejection, although his arguments differed.¹¹

The circumstances surrounding one of Caravaggio's paintings provide some clarity: For *The Death of the Virgin* (see fig. 1), painted for the Carmelites of Santa Maria della Scala, we have not only Bellori's remark—that Caravaggio has copied too accurately a dead and "swollen" woman¹²—published about three generations after the episode of rejection, but also the testimony of a contemporary witness, Giulio Mancini, the author of a treatise on painting who was something of an expert on the topic of decorum (see the essay by Frances Gage, this volume). A few months after the rejection, Mancini corresponded with his brother as to whether he should purchase the painting. He also mentions the reasons that had led to rejection: it had



been removed because the Madonna “was excessively lascivious and indecorous,”¹³ and he writes more extensively in his *Considerazioni* (ca. 1619–21) that the problem with the picture had been that Caravaggio had taken as his model “some dirty prostitute from the Ortacci whom he loved.”¹⁴

For the purposes of this argument, it does not matter whether, as Mancini asserted, the model for the dead Virgin was indeed a harlot who lived in the Ortacci (a notorious brothel) and with whom Caravaggio had relations. What is important is that the critique of the painting focused on the external appearance of the Madonna and that her resemblance to a specific model and her forced humility were regarded as unacceptable in an altarpiece. Caravaggio’s biographer Giovanni Baglione also writes concretely about the depiction of Mary, asserting that she had “poco decoro” (little decorum) because she was “gonfia” (swollen) and that the painter had depicted her with “le gambe scoperte” (her legs showing).¹⁵ For this painting, we have excellent sources, and they are unambiguous.

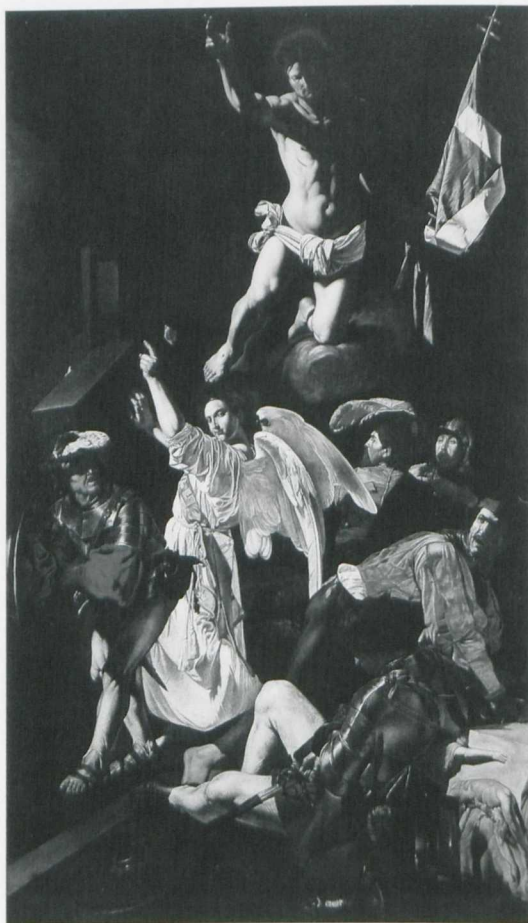
The debate on the violations of decorum in Caravaggio’s works relies exclusively on text. This is striking, because there are numerous visual references to Caravaggio’s works by other artists in their original medium—painting. These visual references clearly demonstrate what those artists found fascinating about Caravaggio’s work and, at the same time, what was not understood as unacceptable to repeat in a sacred context. An example of just such a visual discourse is a painting of Saint Matthew (ca. 1610) by the Bolognese painter Lucio Massari from a cycle of the apostles, still located in the choir of the Santa Maria della Concezione dei Cappuccini (fig. 3).¹⁶ The painting makes clear reference to Caravaggio’s first altarpiece for the Contarelli Chapel, executed just a few years earlier (see fig. 2). Massari keeps the basic arrangement and roles of the figures but fundamentally alters their mode of depiction—a very telling indication of what a painter working a few years after Caravaggio’s Saint Matthew was rejected for the Contarelli Chapel

considered acceptable and unacceptable in a painting intended for a sacred space. Significantly, Massari not only completely changes the external appearance of the protagonists but also interprets the inspiration for and composition of the Gospels very differently. His angel lacks the erotic aura of Caravaggio's prototype, while the evangelist no longer has the "plebeian" appearance of Caravaggio's model (according to Baldinucci).¹⁷ In Massari's painting, Matthew's hand is not guided; rather, the angel assists the saint just by holding the scroll. Like Caravaggio, Massari shows Matthew's legs crossed—Bellori explicitly notes that the crossed legs were criticized in Caravaggio's altarpiece¹⁸—but he does not show the viewer the sole of Matthew's dirty foot.

Massari, a Carracci pupil, could not be described as a Caravaggist in the true sense of the term. Unfortunately, we have very little material and evidence to show how the painters in Caravaggio's close circle dealt with the task of creating an acceptable altarpiece. The mere fact that there are only a few altar paintings by these artists strongly indicates that, after the experience of dealing with Caravaggio's altarpieces, church fathers were hesitant about entrusting painters with this task.

It is worth focusing on one of the few exceptions, the altar painting for Santa Felicità in Florence by the "Caravaggist" Cecco del Caravaggio (fig. 4).¹⁹ Cecco is

Fig. 4.
Cecco del Caravaggio
(Francesco Buoneri) (Italian,
1588/90–after 1620)
The Resurrection, 1619–20,
oil on canvas, 339.1 ×
199.5 cm (133½ × 78½ in.)
Chicago, The Art Institute of
Chicago, 1934.390



supposed to have been the model for Caravaggio's *Amor Victorious* in Berlin (see Olson, fig. 1, this volume) and his Saint John in the Pinacoteca Capitolina (see fig. 6).²⁰ The altarpiece shown in figure 4 is a Resurrection of Christ that plays out, so to speak, on a deep black, boxlike stage. The impression conveyed by the picture is that of a piece of theater (*spettacolo*) performed by an only moderately talented troupe of actors: the resurrected Christ, who wears a loincloth and casts strong, hard shadows, is presented without any foreshortening. He kneels on two artificial-seeming clouds and holds an embroidered banner reminiscent of a procession flag; the banner does not convey even the slightest appearance of being moved as a result of the supposed resurrection. Soldiers in strange postures and wearing fantasy uniforms and fantastic head coverings populate the foreground of the scene—the soldier at the front left even seems to want to steal away—while an angel raises the tomb slab, his gaze addressing the viewer outside the picture and his raised finger pointing in the wrong direction. “Not having been satisfied by it,” the documents note succinctly.²¹ This *spettacolo* went too far even for a patron like the ambassador of the Medici at the papal seat, Piero Guicciardini, who had intended to win Rome's leading Caravaggists for three works in the family chapel in the choir of Santa Felicità in Florence.²² But once again, someone was immediately found who would take the painting into his private collection, and this person had a clear predilection for paintings with theatrical and performative character: Cardinal Scipione Borghese, who also acquired Caravaggio's *Madonna and Child with Saint Anne* from the Arciconfraternità dei Palafrenieri and who possessed the “capriccio,” in which the Trinity was “performed” by “an old man [and] a youth with a dove.”²³

The foregoing examples make two things clear. First, textual and visual documents show that, around 1600, Caravaggio and other painters created works that did not correspond to what was generally considered worthy of depicting or possible to depict over an altar or, generally speaking, in a sacred space. At the time, there were no normatively formulated, generally binding “rules” that told painters what would be accepted in an altarpiece and what would not.²⁴ Of course, that is precisely what led to the discussions about decorum—both contemporaneous discussions, which contributed to the rejection of the pictures, as well as discussions in modern scholarship. Second, these examples show that Caravaggio and others intentionally sought to discover what was possible and acceptable in the sacred context; that is, they tested the limits of the depictable. Their reasons and motives for this course of action are many and multifaceted; let us focus on what these activities lead us to conclude about sacred paintings in profane collections.

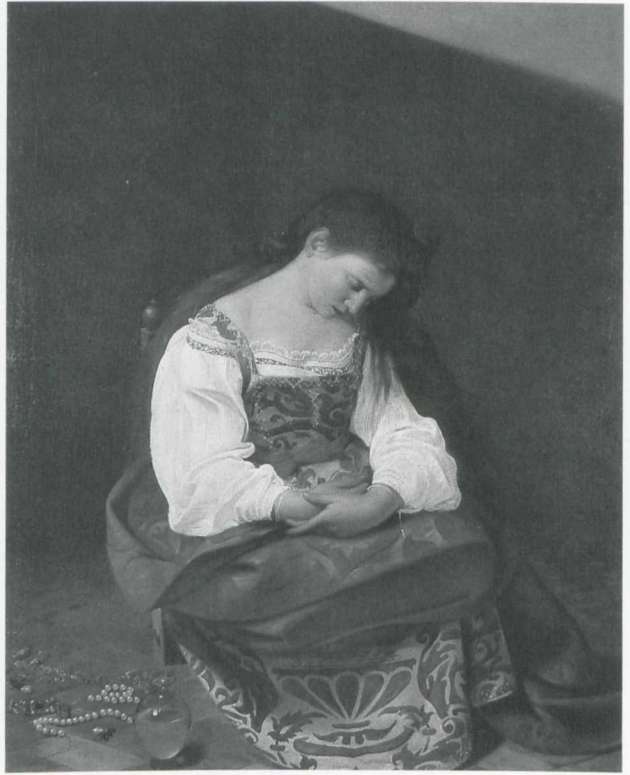
The frequently documented transfer of rejected pictures into private collections makes it clear that these works found their appropriate context for reception and their proper decorum in secular settings. However, the impression that private collections at the time were “norm-free” realms in which painters could try out anything they wanted and in which principles of decorum were obsolete is deceptive. In analyzing the genre of the religious gallery picture, inferences about the conditions of reception and implied production expectations for religious pictures in collections should not be based solely on the phenomenon of decontextualized pictures.

The Demands of the *Debita Espressione* and Explorations of What Is Acceptable: Criticism of Caravaggio's *Mary Magdalen* and Antiveduto Gramatica's *Liberation of Saint Peter*

In contrast to the large number of verbal testimonies about rejected altar paintings, testimonies about paintings in collections are regrettably rare. The compositional norms and possibilities for the religious gallery painting that surely must have existed in some mode were never normatively formulated. There are the often-cited sentences of Giulio Mancini and Giovan Battista Armenini, who wanted to regulate which subjects were suitable for specific rooms,²⁵ but it does not appear that paintings were in fact hung in accordance with their rules, nor can we conclude from these precepts what *ways* of depicting were regarded as adequate for various sites, where the limits of the acceptable were, or what forms of reception the pictures could and were intended to stimulate.²⁶ Leaving aside the difficult topic of reception, let us turn to the issue of decorum in a religious gallery picture.

Lacking a normative theory, we can draw conclusions about the implicit ideas of decorum for religious gallery pictures, as for the altarpieces, from descriptive theories. The theories probably reflect the very extensive discussions that critics engaged in while standing directly in front of the pictures—collections were genuine sites of discourse about art. Unfortunately, those discussions have not come down to us and can only be roughly reconstructed. Here again, visual commentary can provide more information. A case in point is one of Caravaggio's earliest religious paintings, which was intended for a private collection, the *Mary Magdalen* in the Doria Pamphilj collection (fig. 5), probably executed for Gerolamo Vittrici.²⁷ Bellori famously described it in terms evoking a portrait situation. He says Caravaggio portrayed the model sitting in his room and did not add the attributes until a second session.²⁸ Proceeding in this way, he turned a *fanciulla* into a Magdalen: "La finse per Maddalena" is his notable phrasing for the "performative" act of developing the picture, which is metaphorically inscribed in the executed painting through the ostentatious reference to the model and the thereby marked "subsequent" semanticization of the figure. Francesco Scannelli's much earlier critique of the painting, in 1657, says it lacks not only "spirito" (spirit) but also "gratia" (grace) and "debita espressione" (appropriate expressive behavior).²⁹ He thereby indirectly registers a problem of decorum. Although his assessment is not contemporaneous with the painting itself, it seems to be the earliest we have of the Magdalen and needs to be taken seriously. It turns out that the gallery was in no way a norm-free room in which everything was possible and decorum had lost significance entirely. In Scannelli's view, it is clearly inappropriate to portray the saint this way. It seems not to matter to him whether the painting is located in a secular or a sacred space—or at least his remarks give no indication that such a distinction matters. In other words, his remark reflects an absolute understanding of the figure's decorum, not a relative one that would judge the mode of depiction contingent on the site and reception circumstances.

Another viewer has an apparently similar attitude toward a religious picture by Caravaggio intended for a collector: the painting of Saint John the Baptist in



the desert that hangs in the Pinacoteca Capitolina (fig. 6).³⁰ This viewer's name is unknown, but—like Lucio Massari—he articulates not verbally but pictorially. The maker of the Saint John painting shown in figure 7³¹ retained the composition of Caravaggio's John exactly, but he eliminated its three problematic elements: the nakedness of the Baptist, by clothing him in a fur; the semantic indeterminacy, by adding a cross-staff, which unambiguously identifies the figure as John the Baptist; and the ram being hugged by the boy, by transforming it into an iconographically correct lamb. In this way, the anonymous artist provides a critique that shows us what a painter working a few decades after Caravaggio considered acceptable and unacceptable in paintings destined for a domestic setting. However indirectly, he also indicates that basic norms for modes of depiction existed—norms that nonetheless could be transgressed.

These few examples show how difficult it is to come to simple conclusions regarding decorum and the reception of religious images in secular settings. Pointing out only that opinions, tastes, and values differ is not a satisfactory solution. That viewpoints fundamentally diverge is well demonstrated by the fact that Caravaggio's works were highly valued by their first owners yet criticized by other viewers at the same time or later. A painting that inspired one viewer to devotion may have held only prestige value for another and have been primarily aesthetically interesting for a third. Consequently, what a spectator around 1600 did with a religious painting in a private context, whether he or she still employed it in a religious fashion, and how he or she perceived it were quite variable.

Fig. 5.
Michelangelo Merisi
da Caravaggio
(Italian, 1571–1610)
Mary Magdalen, ca. 1595,
oil on canvas, 123 × 98 cm
(48³/₈ × 38⁵/₈ in.)
Rome, Galleria Doria Pamphilj

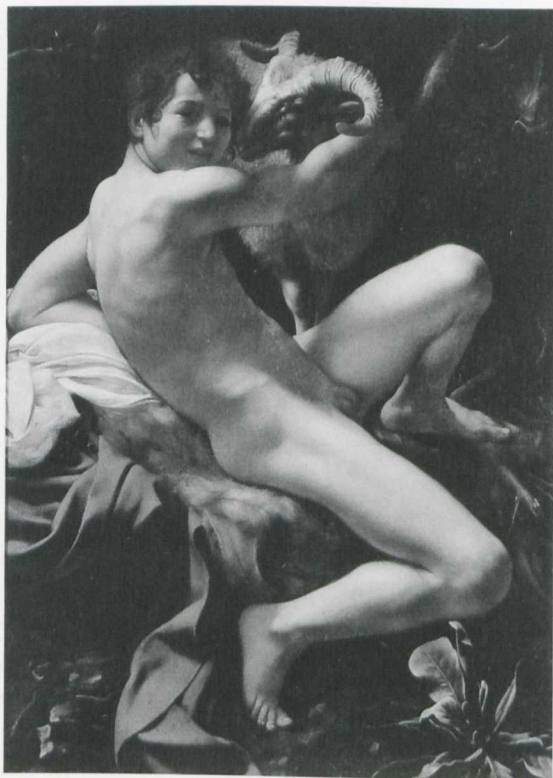


Fig. 6.

Michelangelo Merisi
da Caravaggio

(Italian, 1571–1610)

Saint John in the Desert,

ca. 1602, oil on canvas,

129 × 95 cm

(50³/₄ × 37³/₈ in.)

Rome, Pinacoteca Capitolina



Fig. 7.

Saint John in the Desert,

date unknown, oil on canvas,

115.4 × 85.9 cm

(45³/₈ × 33⁷/₈ in.)

Present location unknown

Let us leave the question of reception behind and turn to the production of pictures. What Francesco Scannelli and especially the anonymous creator of figure 7 apparently criticized about Caravaggio's Saint John (see fig. 6) and his Mary Magdalen (see fig. 5) is the ambiguity between a sacred and a profane subject that results from semantic indeterminacy. This characterizes a large part of the painting production of the early seicento in Caravaggio's milieu.³² Consider, for example, a little-known painting by Antiveduto Gramatica, a depiction of the liberation of Saint Peter from the dungeon (fig. 8), which provides indirect evidence of a discussion of the issues relevant here.³³

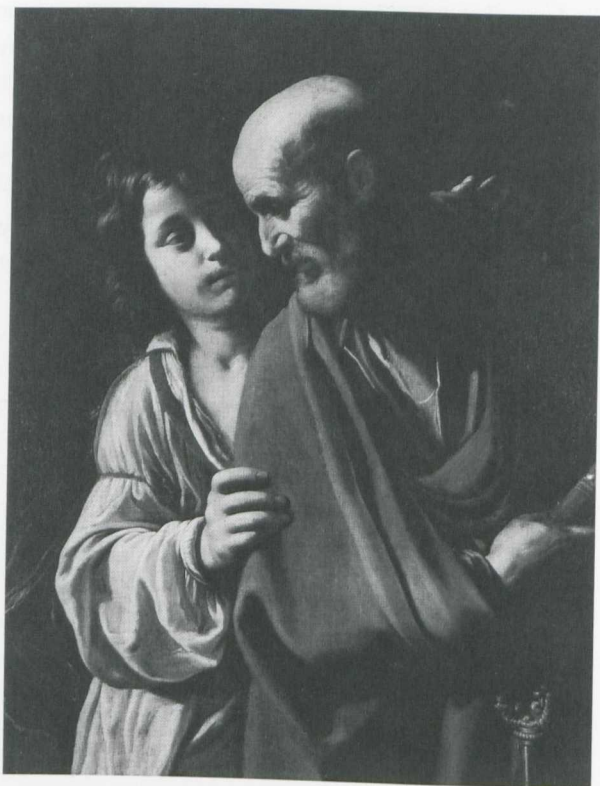
Gramatica places Peter and the angel in a very cramped segment of the composition. They stand in front of an intensely dark background; the angel steps from the rear toward the apostle to move him to escape. The missing accessories are telling: neither Peter nor the angel has a halo; the angel lacks wings and wears a simple belted shirt corresponding to the Caravaggesque angel type of the simple *ragazzo* with portrait-like features.

Gramatica depicts a very early moment of the sequence of action: the angel has apparently just approached Peter and has laid his hands on Peter's shoulder and upper arm. Apart from turning his head to look toward the angel, Peter is responding with extreme restraint. His facial expression seems to convey nothing more than attention and possibly consideration of the sense and significance of the event. Gramatica provides little indication of the painting's subject. The figures do not suggest a sense of motion or indicate to the viewer that they are about to flee. The wingless boy does not look like an angel, and Peter, almost completely bald with his short beard, does not correspond to the traditional image of the leading apostle. The two keys Peter holds give the only unambiguous indication of his identity and therefore of the subject. It is conspicuous that Gramatica does not show the keys in their entirety.

Clearly, Gramatica is testing how far he can go in reducing the painting's significance-bearing signs before it becomes impossible to recognize the subject. He probes the boundary between a painting of a saint and the simple depiction of a man with a boy, which later would, in principle, become a genre painting (a category that emerged during Gramatica's time in Rome but was not yet designated as such). Gramatica is playing a "game" with the semiotics of painting: within his composition, he tests which signs—facial expression, gesture, clothing, body type—are needed to make a figure into a veritable sign with indicatory power.

Against this background, Gramatica created a second picture of this subject, now in a private collection in Rome (fig. 9).³⁴ (We have here—unlike with Caravaggio—a pictorial commentary by the artist himself.) The arrangement and clothing of the figures are identical in the two works, but in the version in the Roman private collection, it is much easier to identify the figures and thus the subject. Here, Peter has a halo and the angel has two oversized wings, and we also see more of Peter's two keys. The *horror vacui* this manifests suggests that figure 9 is the later version.

What can we conclude from this example? First, that a painter like Gramatica was sensitive to his collectors' various value systems and tastes and that he was willing to take them into account when composing his pictures. He apparently knew

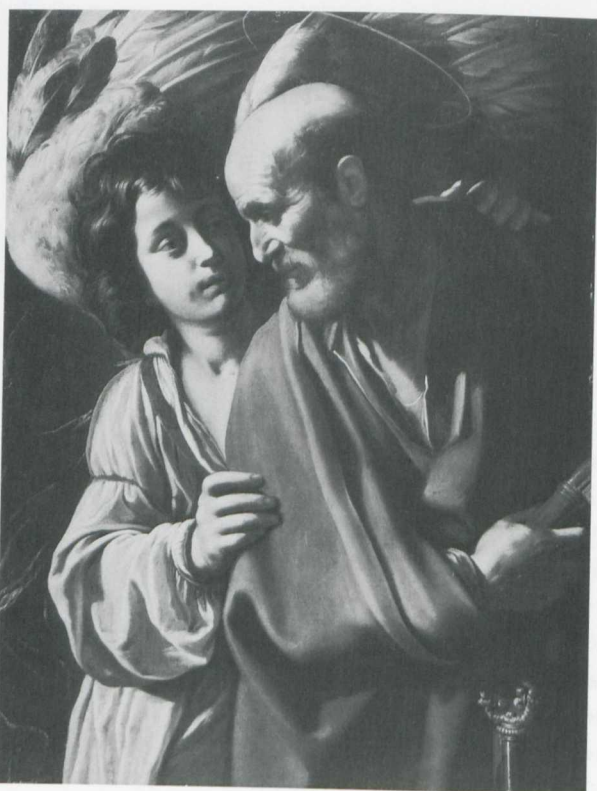
**Fig. 8.**

Antiveduto Gramatica
(Italian, 1571–1626)

Liberation of Saint Peter,

ca. 1613–16, oil on canvas,
96.5 × 75 cm (38 × 29½ in.)

Present location unknown

**Fig. 9.**

Antiveduto Gramatica
(Italian, 1571–1626)

Liberation of Saint Peter,

ca. 1613–16, oil on canvas,
94 × 73 cm (37 × 28¾ in.)

Rome, private collection

whom he had to please with a conventional depiction that was unproblematic in terms of decorum, and he knew who else might take interest in implicit attention to the mode of depiction in a genuinely ambiguous painting. These variable solutions, however, are interesting precisely because they show us that the artists themselves were aware of the unclear situation and the manifest plurality of value systems, of norms of decorum, and, presumably, of the pictures' forms of reception. The question that is so difficult to answer—namely, how viewers actually responded to the paintings—must also have been in the artists' minds at this time, when the first collections of transportable paintings were being built up in Rome. These circumstances are reflected in the works themselves. Parameters and standards were just developing for the relatively new role of the paintings. If Caravaggio tested ambiguous and performative modes of composition in his *Saint John in the Desert* and *Mary Magdalen* and Gramatica offered two versions of the liberation of Saint Peter, then clearly these artists were exploring what could be depicted in, and what norms existed for, their paintings at a time when religious works of art were moving into new settings.

Changes in the mode of depiction and the ongoing issue of decorum are thus consequences of the implicit decontextualization of religious gallery paintings, the unclear standards of evaluation applied to such paintings, and the multiple ways religious paintings functioned and were received; indeed, such changes in depiction are the artists' solutions to these problems. In principle, we can observe the same phenomenon of testing boundaries that we see in the altarpieces, but with the crucial difference that the range of tolerance was obviously much greater in the secular space of a gallery, which provided a more open field for experimentation. In this context, religious paintings in particular offered a fruitful arena for exploring the possibilities of visualization and testing societal norms, and these pictorial explorations created their own visual discourse. In the mode of the ambiguous and performative, the painters took what the signs stood for and the semantic boundaries of the religious as their theme.

Notes

Unless otherwise noted, translations of Italian quotations are by Beatrice Hohenegger.

1. Victor I. Stoichita, "Zurbarán's Verónica," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 54 (1991): 190–206, esp. 206.
2. See Caroline Emmelius, ed., *Offen und verborgen: Vorstellungen und Praktiken des Öffentlichen und Privaten in Mittelalter und früher Neuzeit* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2004).
3. For an exhaustive analysis of decorum and its partial contradictoriness, see Ursula Mildner-Flesch, *Das Decorum: Herkunft, Wesen und Wirkung des Sujetstils am Beispiel Nicolas Poussins* (Saint Augustin: Richarz, 1983), and my study *Mimesis und Selbstbezüglichkeit in Werken Tizians: Studien zum venezianischen Malereidiskurs* (Emsdetten/Berlin: Edition Imorde, 2001), 205–73.
4. For a more in-depth analysis, see my study on Caravaggio and the limits of "permissible depiction," *Caravaggio und die Grenzen des Darstellbaren: Ambiguität*,

Performativität und Ironie in der Malerei um 1600 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2009). Along with a much more comprehensive discussion of the issues developed here, it contains an extensive literature list and discussions of the terminology used. My work on this study enjoyed the support of the Bibliotheca Hertziana, Rome, the Gerda Henkel Stiftung, and the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin, to which I am very grateful.

5. See Creighton E. Gilbert, *Caravaggio and His Two Cardinals* (University Park: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1995), and Luigi Spezzaferro, "Caravaggio rifiutato? 1: Il problema della prima versione del 'San Matteo,'" in *Roma nell'anno 1600: Pittura e giubileo, il revival paleocristiano, Roma sotterranea, Caravaggio "pittore di storia"* (Rome: La Nuova Italia Scientifica, 1980), 49–64; for further biographical reference, see my study *Caravaggio und die Grenzen*, 270–81.
6. We know from the testimony of Francesco Scannelli that this picture, too, was controversial, even if the debate did not ultimately lead to the picture's removal.
7. Roberto Cannatà and Herwarth Röttgen, "Un quadro per la SS. Trinità dei Pellegrini affidato al Caravaggio, ma eseguito dal Cavalier d'Arpino," in Stefania Macioce, ed., *Michelangelo Merisi Caravaggio: La vita e le opere attraverso i documenti; Atti del convegno internazionale di studi, Roma, 5–6 ottobre 1995* (Rome: Logart, 1995), 80–93. The painting by Caravaggio is destroyed or lost. The painting that Giuseppe Cesari finally executed for the Santissima Trinità dei Pellegrini is probably the *Thronum gratiae* in Mexico City, Museo Nacional de San Carlos; see Herwarth Röttgen, *Il Cavalier Giuseppe Cesari d'Arpino: Un grande pittore nello splendore della fama e nell'incostanza della fortuna* (Rome: Ugo Bozzi, 2002), 345–46, cat. no. 108.
8. Quoted in Mia Cinotti, *Michelangelo Merisi detto il Caravaggio* (Bergamo: Bolis, 1983), 575: "[un quadro] d'un vecchio e d'un giovane, con una colomba sotto... capriccio del Caravaggio, col quale ha voluto esprimere la Trinità."
9. On this, see Carolyn Ashley Straughan, *Hidden Artifice: Caravaggio and the Case of the Madonna of the Serpent* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms International, 1998).
10. Luigi Spezzaferro, "Caravaggio rifiutato? 1. Il problema della prima versione del 'San Matteo,'" *Ricerche di storia dell'arte* 10 (1980): 49–64; Luigi Spezzaferro, "Caravaggio accettato: Dal rifiuto al mercato," in Caterina Volpi, ed., *Caravaggio nel IV centenario della Cappella Contarelli: Convegno internazionale di studi, Roma 24–26 maggio 2001* (Città di Castello: Petrucci, 2002), 23–43, esp. 23. He considers the painting as a provisory item, with which Caravaggio wanted to obtain the commission for the entire Matthew cycle. For a critical discussion of this conjecture, see my study *Caravaggio und die Grenzen*, 270–81.
11. Gilbert, *Caravaggio and His Two Cardinals*, 172–73. He doubts that the representation of a saint with crossed feet would have been a problem of decorum. See, however, von Rosen, *Caravaggio und die Grenzen*, 270–81.
12. Giovanni Pietro Bellori, *Le vite de' pittori, scultori, e architetti moderni*, ed. Evelina Borea (Turin: Einaudi, 1976), 231: "La medesima sorte hebbe il Transito della Madonna nella Chiesa della Scala, rimosso per havervi troppo imitato una Donna morta gonfia." Bellori's *Vite* appeared in 1672, but he had finished the biography of

- Caravaggio in 1647 (Donatella Livia Sparti, "La formazione di Giovan Pietro Bellori, la nascita delle Vite e il loro scopo," *Studi di storia dell'arte* 13 [2002]: 177–248).
- On the painting in general, see Pamela Askew, *Caravaggio's Death of the Virgin* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1990).
13. Quoted in Maurizio Marini, *Caravaggio "pictor praestantissimus": L'iter artistico completo di uno dei massimi rivoluzionari dell'arte di tutti i tempi* (Rome: Newton & Compton, 2005), 494: "esser stata spropositata di lascivia e di decoro."
 14. Giulio Mancini, *Considerazioni sulla pittura*, ed. Adriana Marucchi (Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1956), 1:224: "qualche meretrice sozza degli ortacci da lui amata"; see also 1:120.
 15. Giovanni Baglione, *Le vite de' pittori, scultori et architetti: Dal Pontificato di Gregorio XIII. del 1572; In fino a' tempi di Papa Urbano Ottavo nel 1642*, ed. Valerio Mariani (Rome: Stabilimento Arti Grafiche E. Calzone, 1935), 138.
 16. For the painting, see Emilio Negro and Massimo Pironcini, eds., *La scuola dei Carracci: I seguaci di Annibale e Agostino* (Modena: Artioli, 1995), 217–50; see esp. 222, 249.
 17. Filippo Baldinucci, *Notizie dei professori del disegno da Cimabue in qua: Opera distinta in secoli e decennali*, ed. Ferdinando Ranalli (Florence: Batelli, 1845–47; reprint, Florence: Studio per Edizioni Scelte, 1974–75), 3:684–85.
 18. Bellori, *Le vite*, 219–20.
 19. See Gianni Papi, *Cecco del Caravaggio* (Soncino: Edizioni dei Soncino, 2001), 132–35.
 20. Gianni Papi, "Caravaggio e Cecco," in Mina Gregori, ed., *Come dipingeva il Caravaggio* (Milan: Electa, 1996), 123–34.
 21. Quoted in Valentina Fallani, "Piero Guicciardini, il Cigoli, Gherardo Silvani e nuovi documenti sulla cappella Maggiore della chiesa di Santa Felicità di Firenze," in Cristina De Benedictis, ed., *Altari e committenza: Episodi a Firenze nell'età della Controriforma* (Florence: Pontecorboli, 1996), 186: "Non havendo hauto [*sic*] sodisfatione d'essa."
 22. Fallani, "Piero Guicciardini," 186.
 23. Quoted in Cinotti, *Michelangelo Merisi detto il Caravaggio*, 575: "[un quadro] d'un vecchio, e d'un giovane, con una colomba sotto."
 24. For the thematic complex of norms and decorum in Italian painting during the Catholic Reformation, see Christian Hecht, *Katholische Bildertheologie im Zeitalter von Gegenreformation und Barock: Studien zu Traktaten von Johannes Molanus, Gabriele Paleotti und anderen Autoren* (Berlin: Gebrüder Mann, 1997).
 25. Mancini, *Considerazioni*, 1:141–43 in his section titled "Alcune Considerazioni appartenenti alla pittura come di diletto di un gentiluomo nobile e come introductione a quello si deve dire"; also Giovan Battista Armenini, *De' veri precetti della pittura*, ed. Marina Gorreri (Turin: Einaudi, 1988), 198–227.
 26. For more on this subject, see von Rosen, *Caravaggio und die Grenzen*.
 27. Marini, *Caravaggio*, 404–6; Cinotti, *Michelangelo Merisi detto il Caravaggio*, 510–12; the literature dates the painting's execution between 1593 and 1599. On the reconstruction of the commissioning party, see Lothar Sickel, *Caravaggios Rom: Annäherungen an ein dissonantes Milieu* (Emsdetten: Edition Imorde, 2003), 54–64.
 28. Bellori, *Le vite*, 215.

29. Francesco Scannelli, *Il microcosmo della pittura* (Bologna: Nuova Alfa, 1989), 277.
30. See Marini, *Caravaggio*, 475–78; Cinotti, *Michelangelo Merisi detto il Caravaggio*, 521–23; on the topic of the appropriateness of the depiction, see Valeska von Rosen, “Ambiguità intenzionale: L’ignudo nella Pinacoteca Capitolina e altre raffigurazioni del San Giovanni Battista di Caravaggio e dei ‘Caravaggisti,’” in Sybille Ebert-Schifferer et al., eds., *Caravaggio e il suo ambiente: Ricerche e interpretazioni* (Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 2007), 59–85.
31. See Alfred Moir, *Caravaggio and His Copyists* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1976), 87, cat. no. 16g. The painting’s current whereabouts are unknown.
32. For an in-depth discussion, see von Rosen, *Caravaggio und die Grenzen*.
33. Its current whereabouts are unknown (sale: *Importants tableaux et dessins anciens et du XIXème siècle*, Christie’s, Monaco [Monte Carlo], 2 December 1989, lot 13). Helmut Philipp Riedl, *Antiveduto della Grammatica (1570/71–1626): Leben und Werk* (Munich: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 1998), 114; Gianni Papi, *Antiveduto Gramatica* (Soncino: Edizioni del Soncino, 1995), 130, cat. no. 46.
34. See Riedl, *Antiveduto della Grammatica*, 113–14; Papi, *Antiveduto Gramatica*, 109, cat. no. 47.