

# GUIDO RENI and ROME

## NATURE and DEVOTION

1 March - 22 May 2022

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With ***Guido Reni and Rome: Nature and Devotion***, curated by Francesca Cappelletti, the Galleria Borghese will inaugurate, more than thirty years after his last major exhibition in Italy, the first of a series of international exhibitions dedicated to the Master of the Italian 17th century.

The exhibition revolves around Reni's painting ***Country Dance*** (c. 1605), which re-entered the Museum's collection a year ago. Its acquisition is a crucial element for reconstructing the first years of the artist's stay in Rome. Part of Cardinal Scipione's collection, mentioned from the beginning of the 17th century in the old inventories, sold in the 19th century, and considered lost until it reappeared in 2008 on the London antique market as a work by an *anonymous Bolognese*, the painting – appropriately authenticated – was **reacquired by the Galleria in 2020**. In addition to constituting an important historical, integral part of the Museum's heritage, its presence in the rooms of the pinacotheca next to the other paintings of the collection highlights the crucial importance of the Borghese patronage for Guido Reni and provides an opportunity to reflect on the painter's relationship with rural themes and landscape painting, which up to now have been considered "extraneous" to his production.

Through the display of **over 30 works**, ***Guido Reni and Rome: Nature and Devotion*** aims to reconstruct – starting with Reni's interest in landscape painting compared to other painters active in Rome in the early 17th century – the **first years of the artist's stay in Rome**, his enthusiastic study of antiquity and the Renaissance, his stupefaction regarding the painting of **Caravaggio** – whom he met and frequented – and his relations with his patrons.

*"The exhibition, ideated around our new painting, number 609 in the collection, reconstructs Guido's first stay in Rome: we cannot define it as a path of youthful formation because the great artist arrived at the age of 26, out of curiosity and in search of new opportunities, but on the wave of a brilliant career in his homeland. He was a painter who already knew too much, as Annibale Carracci seems to have said about him, and in Rome he remains of great success. What this city gave him and what he left behind is the story we want to tell and of which the exhibition is only the starting point. The catalogue will be accompanied by an itinerary on the Roman places of Guido, so that the visitor can discover churches and museums that preserve other works of our painter and connect the Gallery to the city, observe the frescoes, go beyond the years of Guido's Roman stay, understand the critical fortune of the artist and the roots of the legendary perfection, which is attributed to him",* comments Francesca Cappelletti.

## THE EXHIBITION

The exhibition itinerary starts on the ground floor, in the large entrance hall, with **4 monumental altarpieces** – the *Crucifixion of Saint Peter* (1604-5), the *Trinity with the Madonna of Loreto and the Patron, Cardinal Antonio Maria Gallo* (1603-4), the *Martyrdom of Saint Catherine of Alexandria* (c. 1606), and the *Martyrdom of Saint Cecilia* (1601) – that highlight the artist's ability, already developed in the years preceding his arrival in Rome, to measure himself in this genre, to move people by the solemnity and power of his perfect figures. They also tell us a lot about Reni's relations with his patrons: **Paolo Emilio Sfondrato, Antonio Maria Gallo, Ottavio Costa, and Pietro Aldobrandini**.

In the adjacent rooms, works such as the *Massacre of the Innocents* (1611) and *Saint Paul Reproaches the Penitent Saint Peter* (c.1609) confirm that Reni's painting in Rome, as well as somewhat later – such as *Lot and His Daughters* and *Atalanta and Hippomenes* (1615-20) – is based on a strong attraction to the expertise of the sculptor, as shown in the position of the bodies in space, the three-dimensional concreteness of the gestures, and the facial expressions, which masterfully capture forever a specific emotion.

On the second floor, in the **second part** of the exhibition, **generous loans** and the Galleria's exceptional **collection** allows itineraries and digressions around the landscape theme and the Galleria's latest acquisition, the **Country Dance**. To highlight the practice of landscape painting in Rome in the first decade of the 17th century, on display in the Lanfranco Room are several of the Emilian prerequisites: from the *Landscape with Deer Hunt* by **Niccolò dell'Abate** to the *Country Fete* (1584) by **Agostino Carracci**, a few paintings by **Paul Bril** from the Galleria's collection, and *Landscape with Arianna Abandoned* and *Landscape with Salmacis and Hermaphroditus* (c. 1606-8), two of the six landscapes with mythological figures by **Carlo Saraceni**, formerly part of the Farnese collection, from the **Capodimonte Museum**.

Then there are several late, literary experiments by Bolognese painters, from the four round paintings by **Francesco Albani** – landscapes inhabited by goddesses and nymphs executed in 1621 for Scipione Borghese – to the *Landscape with Silvia and the Satyr* (1615) by **Domenichino**, from the **Bologna Pinacoteca**, showing that such interest continued in the decades subsequent to those first intense years of the century.

The itinerary between Reni and his contemporaries, between landscape and figure, ends in Rome with the fresco executed in 1613-14 in the Casino dell'Aurora, part of Cardinal Scipione Borghese's town house, now Palazzo Pallavicini Rospigliosi. Between the frescoes by Paul Bril and Antonio Tempesta, Reni imagined the rising Sun, surrounded by the Hours and preceded by Dawn, with, in the background, a glimpse of a **seascape**, which takes us back to the *Country Dance* – now returned to the residence that once belonged to Scipione Borghese – and with which the exhibition ends.

One of the artist's **greatest masterpieces**, the fresco ideally represents the end of his fruitful, but tormented relationship with the Borghese family, as well as of his first, crucial stay in Rome.

## RENI'S FIRST STAY IN ROME

Young Reni arrived in Rome – a city of comparisons and challenges for artists – at the beginning of the 17th century, probably at the invitation of Cardinal Paolo Emilio Sfondrato, whom he had met in Bologna in 1598. A nephew of Pope Gregory XIV, the latter visited the city in the suite of Clement VIII, made Reni's acquaintance, and asked him to paint a copy of Raphael's *Ecstasy of Saint Cecilia*. This version arrived in Rome before the artist, who stayed there, with frequent interruptions, until 1614.

At the beginning of his stay he executed a series of works with religious subjects for Cardinal Sfondrato, who sold part of his collection to Scipione Borghese in 1608. Dating from 1604, the *Crucifixion of Saint Peter* marks a time of **insistent comparison with Caravaggio** and passionate youthful experimentation. Commissioned by Cardinal **Pietro Aldobrandini** for the abbey of San Paolo alle Tre Fontane, the canvas – together with other works, such as *David with the Head of Goliath* (1605) – reveals Reni's attentiveness not only to Caravaggio, but also to the manners of other artists of his time, which, reworked, were to lead to his singular and admired way of painting, in which Caravaggio's dramatic *chiaroscuro* is grafted onto Ludovico Carracci's lesson.

Another **crucial time of his stay in Rome**, highlighted by the exhibition, was his relationship with the Genoese banker **Ottavio Costa**, an art collector and patron who played a very important role in Rome, among other things because of his unscrupulous use of the copies he commissioned of such paintings of his as the *Saint Francis in Ecstasy* and the *Saint John the Baptist* by Caravaggio. The names of Reni and Caravaggio are often found paired, together with Annibale Carracci's, in Costa's papers, as they were in the considerations of other significant figures in the cultural history of this extraordinary period, such as Marquis Vincenzo Giustiniani.

The exhibition is accompanied by a **catalogue** published by **Marsilio**, with texts by, among others, **Daniele Benati, Raffaella Morselli, and Maria Cristina Terzaghi**: an innovative interpretation of the Master's work based on a scholarly study of Reni as a landscape painter.

**With the aim of allowing the greatest possible access to the exhibition and of supporting cultural consumption, the Galleria Borghese has decided to not apply any surcharge on tickets, which will thus continue to cost the same, while allowing access to both the exhibition and the permanent collection.**