

Baroque

Caravaggio

Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio was one of the most revolutionary artists of his time. He was born on September 29th, 1571 in Milan. Caravaggio was naturally talented and drawn to the Baroque style of extremes, especially chiaroscuro. Where other Baroque artists seemed to add light to darkness, Caravaggio seemed to add shadows to light. Since he was from Italy, he painted in the Italianate Baroque style. He included religious icons in his paintings but challenged the accepted catechism. This defiance of the accepted church teaching appalled the staunchly Catholic Italians who were already defensive against the Protestants. Yet, because the trend of the time was to question the accepted, Caravaggio was an instant popular success.

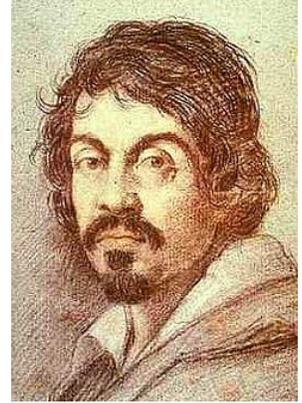


Figure 1: self-portrait



Figure 2: *The Sacrifice of Isaac*

Caravaggio's natural talent attracted much attention from the art world. He was so skilled at reproducing reality that recent art historians have been able to identify a specific fungus, that was prevalent at the time, on a piece of fruit in one of Caravaggio's paintings. It wasn't until Caravaggio was 24 however, that his professional art career really took off. He received an important commission to paint the church of San Luigi dei Francesi. He was to paint three works that depicted the life of St. Matthew. Caravaggio was the kind of person who did things for shock value and he used these three pieces to stun the world. One painting, *The Calling of St. Matthew*, shows Jesus entering a tavern to summon Matthew as an apostle. A shaft of light illuminates Matthew and other men counting money at a

table. Although not necessarily shocking to the modern world, the idea of showing religious figures as everyday people – in a tavern, no less – was tantamount to blasphemy.

Despite criticism, *The Calling of St. Matthew* built Caravaggio's reputation. As a person who loved to shock others, Caravaggio relished the attention. He became known as a ladies' man who was willing to pick a fight with anyone over the smallest issue. He was thrown in jail on several occasions, vandalized his own apartment, and ultimately had a death warrant issued for him by the Pope. An early published notice on him, dating from 1604, tells how "after a fortnight's work he will swagger about for a month or two with a sword at his side and a servant following him, from one ball-court to the next, ever ready to engage in a fight or an argument, so that it is most awkward to get along with him." At one point in 1606, his anger



Figure 3: *The Calling of St. Matthew*

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became so intense he killed a man over a disputed score in a game of tennis. The Pope put out a warrant for his arrest so Caravaggio had to flee Rome. He was a fugitive for the rest of his life, narrowly escaping an attempt on his life in 1609. Ironically, it was during his short time on the run that he created some of his best work.

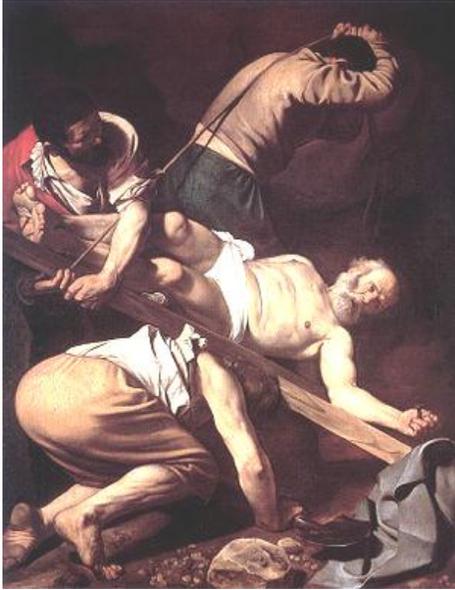


Figure 4: *The Martyrdom of St. Peter*

He was found dead in 1616, at the age of 39. The cause of death is unknown.

Sources

www.wikipedia.com (don't worry, I verified all information ☺)

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