

first in a series of monographic presentations of artists who participated in the feminist avant-garde of the 1960s and 1970s. In privileging physical objects, such as ceramics, photographs and collages, rather than the more ephemeral mediums of performance and video associated with both English and her peers, the exhibition makes an important intervention in how feminist art is presented. That this intervention comes from a gallery is unsurprising – ceramics sell better than performances – yet market concerns do occasionally have reverberations in art history, not least because gallery presentations influence museum acquisitions. To this end, the success of the *100% Women* programme is not its celebration of women artists, but its ability to elevate the market value (and thus widen the scope) of feminist art.

Yet monographic exhibitions of women artists do not avoid the flattening incurred in survey presentations entirely, particularly when, like *100% Women*, they form part of a larger programme. Similarly, the press release for *Sixty Years*, which lists the eight monographic exhibitions of women artists Tate will mount in 2019, suggests that these exhibitions are themselves part of the wider project. Anni Albers, Natalia Goncharova and Dorothea Tanning; Sol Calero, Anna Boghiguian and Otobong Nkanga, suddenly form components of one large display, or, as the curators described the artists in *Women Artists*, “a *musée imaginaire* where, by some extraordinary circumstances, all the artists happen to be women and not men.”<sup>3</sup> The ‘extraordinary circumstances’ that unified the artists in *Women Artists* was their marginalisation. This narrative doesn’t quite fit for the artists populating Tate’s exhibition programme, some of whom *did* (and continue to) enjoy success relative to

their male contemporaries. The novelty of Nochlin’s *musée imaginaire* has worn thin.

*Sixty Years* and *100% Women* are the latest plot points on a long history that began in 1976. The growing list of exhibitions and programmes celebrating women artists attests to the persistence of the problems Nochlin sought to address forty years ago, namely the exclusion of women from both the museum and the market. But, if the problem persists despite the proliferation of such exhibitions, at what point does the strategy of celebrating women artists have to be called into question? Is it possible that the solution *upholds* the problem? As long as the category of ‘woman artist’ endures, so too will their marginalisation. Perhaps it is time to stop celebrating women artists and start celebrating art by women.

- 1 Ann Sutherland Harris and Linda Nochlin, *Women Artists: 1550-1950*, Los Angeles, 1976, p. 11
- 2 Maura Reilly, ‘Introduction: Towards Transnational Feminisms’, in Linda Nochlin and Maura Reilly (eds.) *Global Feminisms: New Directions in Contemporary Art*, Brooklyn, 2007, p. 17
- 3 Ibid.

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**‘Utrecht, Caravaggio and Europe’,  
Centraal Museum Utrecht, Utrecht,  
16 December 2018 – 24 March 2019.  
Catalogue: Eds. Bernd Ebert and  
Liesbeth M. Helmus, Munich, 2018,  
304 pages, hardback, ISBN: 978-3-7774-  
3133-8, £45.00.**

In 2003, Caravaggio’s *Basket of Fruit* appeared on the front cover of a scientific journal under the title: ‘Emerging Infectious Diseases’.<sup>1</sup> It is

difficult not to see it as a witty commentary on the ‘Caravaggiomania’ that has escalated in the museum world in the last decades. The front cover might well imply that the numerous painters that arrived in Rome from all over Europe between 1600 and the 1630s were compelled by a contagious disease that struck those who were presumed to have encountered Caravaggio’s work. Certainly, Caravaggio’s fever has entered the museum and art-historical literature, which has increasingly classified many painters from different parts of Europe as ‘Caravaggisti’. Caravaggio’s primacy over his ‘followers’ has been reiterated in past exhibitions and epitomized by Sebastian Schutze’s description of the Caravaggisti as ‘planets, asteroids, meteorites and comets’ rotating around Caravaggio, ‘the central star’.<sup>2</sup>

In the exhibition ‘Utrecht, Caravaggio and Europe’, Bernd Ebert and Liesbeth M. Helmus seek to counter this tendency by focusing on the three painters from Utrecht – ter Brugghen, van Hornost, van Baburen – who travelled to Rome aiming to see Caravaggio’s work. Bringing together seventy works of these painters and their European contemporaries – Manfredi, Ribera, Vouet, Tournier, Valentin de Boulogne and others – the exhibition presents the intricate relation between the three and those that worked across other cities. Dutch, Italian, Spanish and French painters are treated as independent, outspoken and self-willed personalities who translated their different experiences into personal pictorial paradigms.<sup>3</sup> The goal of the exhibition is subtly implied by the title, which stays away from outworn terms like ‘followers’ or ‘Caravaggisti’, avoiding to suggest a direct legacy between Caravaggio and this generation of artists.

Caravaggio’s name, though, is still

central, and at first one wonders if this is the umpteenth exploitation of his fame as a box-office attraction. His presence is prominent at the beginning of the exhibition, where a reproduction of his *Crucifixion of St. Peter* by an anonymous Spanish painter overwhelms van Honthorst’s autograph drawing, the only explicit link between Caravaggio’s work and the Utrecht Caravaggisti. Although viewers are invited to notice some innovative details in the drawing, they are also reminded that copying Caravaggio’s canvases in Roman churches was carried out by painters from different cultural outlooks. A video projected on the adjacent wall emphasises the different orientations of the two cities, making their intersection in the paintings all the more striking. Indeed, this first room does not keep to the notion of Caravaggio as the catalyst for this range of painters, nor does it confine their idiosyncratic pictorial vocabularies to the shadow of his example. It rather sets up the complex relationships between these artists that are further explored in the following rooms.

Indeed, once viewers leave the introductory context of the chapel, they enter a seventeenth-century picture gallery, where sacred, mythological and secular themes intersect in unexpected ways. The Utrecht Caravaggisti are compared with a wide range of European painters, grouped thematically regardless of provenance or chronology. Caravaggio’s *Entombment of Christ*, only briefly on show, is set between van Baburen’s and Tournier’s equally monumental representations of the scene. Surprisingly, this arrangement does not make Caravaggio prevail. Through visual comparison, viewers become acquainted with each artist’s personal pictorial choices. In Baburen’s *Entombment*, the dense handling of colour creates a sense

of slumped corporeality, while in Tournier's *Entombment* a less modulated chiaroscuro deprives the action of bodily weight. The gracefulness that distinguishes Tournier's figures also emerges in the thematic group 'Saints'. Among depictions of half-bust Saints surrounding Caravaggio's *St. Jerome*, viewers are presented with Tournier's elegant *St. Andrew*, stylistically closer to Ribera's *St. Andrew* for their modelling of bodily volumes, expressive intensity and tactile treatment of the surfaces – later found in Ribera's *David and Goliath*. The comparison with Ribera's image of the Saint, however, reveals Tournier's different use of light. Instead of dramatically descending from above, it is evenly spread, creating playful colour variations on *St. Andrew's* garments.

The juxtaposition of Caravaggio's *St. Jerome* and Serodine's *St. Peter Reading* is even more striking. Despite the similarity of the composition, Serodine's painting is built from thick impasto and heavy brushstrokes, which create a warm and glimmering ambience. This technique makes Serodine's style unmistakable when viewers later encounter his *Christ Among the Doctors*. His rendering of flickering candlelight diverges from the dim illumination and murky atmosphere in van Honthorst's *Christ before the High Priest* and the *Beheading of St. John the Baptist* displayed in the same room, whose figures emerge from choreographed darkness as they approach the candle. This lightening also differentiates Dutch artists' genre paintings from Manfredi's gloomy *Drinking and Musical Party*, populated by shabby figures, or from Régnier's dramatically lit and quasi-theatrical characters in his *Cardsharps and Fortune Teller*.

These are but a few of the suggestive comparisons that this exhibition offers. Viewers are encouraged to discover

relations among the paintings and pictorial uniqueness through an independent work of observation. Audio-guides are provided, but textual explanations are omitted from the exhibition space, which can be experienced as an early modern gallery. Themes alone are specified, enabling the viewers to skip the meaning-making moment and to focus on the pictorial components of the paintings. Engaging in visual analysis, after all, was at the core of the collecting drive of early modern patrons. Through repetition and differentiation, viewers realise the power of Valentin's characters, Tournier's grace, Vouet's pearlescent colors, the gloom in the eyes of Manfredi's figures, van Hornost's semidarkness, ter Brugghen's warm glow of dawn. In this exhibition, visitors finally seize the numerous peculiarities that make these canvases wonderful things of their own.

- 1 Peter Drotman (ed.), *Emerging Infectious Diseases*, Vol. 9, No. 12, Dec. 2003, pp. 1509–1666.
- 2 David Franklin and Sebastian Schütze (eds.), *Caravaggio. His followers in Rome*, Yale, 2011, 26–47.
- 3 Bernd Ebert and Liesbeth M. Helmus (eds.), *Utrecht, Caravaggio and Europe*, Munich, 2018.

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**'Mantegna and Bellini', National Gallery, London, 1 October 2018 - 27 January 2019**

'Together they shaped the art of the Renaissance', states the subheading of the exhibition 'Mantegna and Bellini', held in London at the National Gallery. Tracing the careers of the two artists, it displays over six rooms a vast number of paintings and drawings, in the attempt to uncover