

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

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NATIONAL GALLERY CELEBRATES 400TH ANNIVERSARY OF GUERCINO'S BIRTH WITH TWO MAJOR EXHIBITIONS

WASHINGTON, DC -- The National Gallery of Art will present two exhibitions in honor of the four-hundredth anniversary of the birth of one of the most singularly gifted of all Italian baroque painters, Giovanni Francesco Barbieri, known as Guercino. Guercino: Master Painter of the Baroque is the first American exhibition devoted to the artist's paintings. Guercino: Drawings from Windsor Castle includes sixty works selected from the largest and finest group of the artist's drawings in the world.

The majority of works shown on this occasion, which come primarily from European public and private collections, have never before been seen in the United States. The drawings will be presented in three galleries followed by the eight galleries of paintings in the West Building, March 15 through May 17, 1992.

Guercino: Master Painter of the Baroque is made possible by a grant from The Florence Gould Foundation. Both exhibitions are supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

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"This is a rare opportunity for visitors to enjoy the full spectrum of Guercino's brilliance as a painter and draftsman," said J. Carter Brown, director, National Gallery of Art. "His masterful paintings and drawings are among the treasures of the great museums of the world, and we are grateful to the many lenders to these exhibitions, including Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II."

Guercino: Master Painter of the Baroque was organized by the Pinacoteca Nazionale, Bologna, with the Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt, and the National Gallery of Art. The paintings shown in Washington were selected by Diane De Grazia, the National Gallery's curator of southern baroque painting, in consultation with Sir Denis Mahon, the preeminent expert on Guercino.

Guercino: Drawings from Windsor Castle was organized by the Royal Library, Windsor Castle, in conjunction with the National Gallery of Art, the Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, and the Drawing Center, New York. Andrew Robison, Andrew W. Mellon senior curator, coordinated the drawings exhibition on behalf of the National Gallery of Art.

The sixty works in Guercino: Master Painter of the Baroque represent all phases of the artist's career. The paintings reveal the primary influence of the Carracci (painters Ludovico and his cousins, the brothers Agostino and Annibale) and members of their art academy as well as the dramatic change from Guercino's naturalistic early works to his later, classical style.

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Masterpieces in the exhibition include Susanna and the Elders (1617) from the Prado in Madrid, which demonstrates Guercino's phenomenal talent for bringing narrative to life; Apollo Flaying Marsyas (1618) from the Palazzo Pitti in Florence, which documents the artist's seduction by Venetian painting at a pivotal moment in his development; Saint William Receives the Monastic Habit (1620) from the Pinacoteca Nazionale in Bologna, the crowning achievement of Guercino's early mature period; and The Intervention of the Sabine Women (1645) from the Louvre in Paris, a monumental work characteristic of his grand classical manner.

Guercino: Drawings from Windsor Castle was selected from the collection of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II in the Royal Library, Windsor Castle. Although Guercino declined Charles I's invitation to come to England in 1625, many of his works subsequently made their way to Britain, particularly in the eighteenth century. The corpus of drawings at Windsor that are by or related to Guercino numbers 846 and was acquired early in the reign of King George III.

Guercino drawings are among the most felicitous and beautiful of any made by Italian artists and have been avidly collected and appreciated through the centuries. The drawings in the exhibition include a variety of media and styles, revealing an extremely wide range of subjects, and they vary in mood from deeply religious to comical. A number of the drawings are preparatory sketches for paintings included in the exhibition.

Giovanni Francesco Barbieri, called il Guercino (Italian for "the squinter"), was born in Cento, a small town near Ferrara, in Emilia, in 1591. He began his career as a provincial painter influenced by Bolognese and Ferrarese artists. In 1621 a pope from Bologna, Gregory XV, summoned Guercino to Rome where he painted the celebrated ceiling fresco of Aurora at the Villa Ludovisi and an altarpiece for Saint Peter's, among other important commissions. Guercino returned to Cento in 1623 after the death of the pope. He never married but remained extremely close to his family and relatives -- especially his brother and frequent collaborator, the still-life painter Paolo Antonio Barbieri (1603-1649). Guercino succeeded Guido Reni as the leading painter in Bologna following the latter's death in 1642. He continued to be acclaimed in his later years and died in 1666.

The English edition of the catalogue for Guercino: Master Painter of the Baroque, published by the National Gallery of Art, is written principally by Sir Denis Mahon, with an introduction by Andrea Emiliani, soprintendente dei beni artistici e storici, Bologna, and essays by Diane De Grazia of the National Gallery and Sybille Ebert-Schifferer, director of the Hessisches Landesmuseum, Darmstadt. Before coming to the Gallery, many of the paintings were seen at the Museo Civico Archeologico, Bologna, Pinacoteca Civica and Chiesa del Rosario, Cento, and the Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt.

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The exhibition catalogue for Guercino: Drawings from Windsor Castle was written by Nicholas Turner, deputy keeper in the department of prints and drawings in the British Museum, who recently was co-author with Sir Denis Mahon of the catalogue raisonné, The Drawings of Guercino in the Collection of Her Majesty The Queen at Windsor Castle. The drawings exhibition, which was seen at the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth, will travel to the Drawing Center in New York, June 2 - August 1, 1992, where it is sponsored by the Robert Lehman Foundation, Inc.

A recorded tour of the exhibitions is available at the entrance to the exhibitions for \$3.50; \$3.00 for senior citizens, students, and groups of ten or more. To reserve recorded tours for groups, call (202) 842-6592. Special tours of the exhibitions meet in the West Building rotunda at 1:00 p.m. on March 28, and at 12:00 noon on March 29, and April 1, 7, and 10. Special appointment tours can be arranged by calling (202) 842-6249 for school groups or (202) 842-6247 for adult groups of twenty or more. Slide lectures on Guercino and his contemporaries will be held in the East Building auditorium on a first-come, first-served basis on March 15 at 4:00 p.m., and in a three lecture series on April 7, 14, and 21 at 12:00 noon. For more information, call (202) 842-6690.

Admission to the National Gallery of Art is free of charge. The Gallery hours are 10:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m., Monday through Saturday, and 11:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m., Sunday. The general information number is (202) 737-4215, TTY: (202) 842-6176.