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National Gallery of Art



Update: December 15, 2020 (original release date: January 2, 2020)

National Gallery of Art Celebrates Extravagant Baroque Style of 17th- and Early 18th-Century Genoa in Landmark Exhibition on View September 26, 2021 through January 9, 2022



Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione
The Adoration of the Shepherds, 1645
oil on canvas
Fondazione Spinola, Chiesa di San Luca, Genoa

Washington, DC—The visual arts in Genoa at the beginning of the 17th century exhibited extraordinary diversity and richness. The city's enormous wealth enabled its artists and their patrons to create an exuberant expression of the baroque style through works of material and visual splendor. ***A Superb Baroque: Art in Genoa, 1600–1750*** is the first comprehensive exhibition of the period in nearly 30 years and the first of this scale in the United States. Organized in partnership with the Scuderie del Quirinale, Rome, it will feature some 130 paintings, sculptures, decorative arts, drawings, and prints from 56 lenders, including 13 private collections and five churches in Genoa and Liguria.

Accompanied by a fully illustrated catalog, this landmark exhibition will be on view from September 26, 2021 through January 9, 2022, in the West Building of the National Gallery of Art.

One of the most important ports in the Mediterranean and a formidable maritime power, Genoa became a functioning republic in the early 16th century and steadily transformed itself into the banking center of Europe. Its leading families accumulated extraordinary wealth and in their competition for social prestige and political position invested it in visual culture: civil construction, ecclesiastical projects, and, above all, their own residences, which were then filled with the fresco decoration and collections for which the city is still famed. Aided by its unique strategic position in relation to numerous Italian centers and the dominions of the king of Spain (Milan, Naples, Sicily, and Flanders), Genoa developed far-reaching commercial and financial networks, and a tradition of exchange of all kinds. Its culture took on an incomparably varied and complex expression.

"Genoese artists and their patrons created an art that was a singularly rich and beautiful expression of baroque style," said Kaywin Feldman, director, National Gallery of Art. "We are grateful to our partner organization, the Scuderie del Quirinale in Rome, lending institutions, Genoa's city museums, and private collections, as well as to the churches in Genoa and Liguria who generously lent their priceless treasures for this remarkable exhibition."

Exhibition Organization

The exhibition is organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington and the Scuderie del Quirinale, Rome, with special cooperation from the City and Museums of Genoa.

The exhibition is made possible by the Robert Lehman Foundation.

Additional funding is provided by The Exhibition Circle of the National Gallery of Art.

Exhibition Curators

The exhibition is curated by Jonathan Bober, Andrew W. Mellon Senior Curator of Prints and Drawings National Gallery of Art; Piero Boccardo, superintendent of collections for the City of Genoa; and Franco Boggero, director of historic and artistic heritage at the Soprintendenza Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio, Genoa.

Exhibition Tour

National Gallery of Art, Washington, September 26, 2021–January 9, 2022
Scuderie del Quirinale, Rome, Spring 2022

About the Exhibition

Organized by themes within the broad stylistic development of the period, ***A Superb Baroque: Art in Genoa, 1600–1750*** will feature some 60 paintings: masterpieces by non-Genoese artists drawn to the city's vital environment, including Peter Paul Rubens, Giulio Cesare Procaccini, Orazio Gentileschi, Anthony van Dyck; outstanding works by the school's few artists who are well known because of their activity outside the city—Bernardo Strozzi, Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione, and Alessandro Magnasco; and superb examples by native Genoese painters who worked primarily in the city and remain largely unknown—Giacchino Assereto, Valerio Castello, Domenico Piola, Gregorio De Ferrari, and Bartolomeo Guidobono.

Sculpture attained the level and exuberance of painting in the second half of the 17th century. Represented in the exhibition will be several full-size statues by masters such as Pierre Puget, Filippo Parodi, and Anton Maria Maragliano, as well as terracotta sketches and exquisite bronze repetitions of monumental groups. In the decorative arts, collaborations between Genoese designers and Flemish craftsmen—in particular, Mattheus Melijn and Giovanni Aelbosca Belga—yielded ceremonial silver ensembles from the beginning of the period that are among the most spectacular in Europe. The outstanding quality of this silverwork epitomizes Genoese craftsmanship and its basis in the close interactions between patrons, painters, and silversmiths.

Equally important are the period's works on paper—some 60 will be on view, many by the same artists responsible for the paintings and objects. The largest group of 18 works comes from Genoa's city museums, while 15 works are from the Gallery's own collection, most just recently acquired. The drawings exemplify the elaborate technique, pictorial character, and production of autonomous function that distinguish Genoese draftsmanship during the period. Though relatively few Genoese artists explored the technique of etching, Castiglione and his follower Bartolomeo Biscaino surpassed any other native Italian printmaker in imagination and fluency.

Monumental fresco decoration emerged as the essential Genoese art form in the second half of the 16th century. Over the next century and a half, the leading painters collaborated with specialists in fictive architecture and stucco sculptors to create incomparably rich ensembles. The projects of Castello, Piola, and De Ferrari mark the apex of this tradition as well as one of the great chapters in European interior decoration. The exhibition conveys the significance and enthralling beauty of these ensembles through a selection of *bozzetti* (preliminary compositional studies in oil) and *modelli* (more advanced, usually final, models for presentation to the client)—several of very large scale—and through many preparatory drawings.

Exhibition Catalog

The exhibition in Washington will be accompanied by a lavishly illustrated, 384-page catalog made possible by the Robert Lehman Foundation, the Wolfgang Ratjen Foundation, Liechtenstein, and the Samuel H. Kress Foundation. Produced and published by the National Gallery of Art in association with Princeton University Press, the book consists of four essays by the leading experts and exhibition curators—Bober, Boccardo, and Boggero—as well as Peter M. Lukehart, associate dean of the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts, National Gallery of Art, and Andrea Zanini, associate professor of economic history at the University of Genoa. Also featured are ten section introductions that provide a synthetic history of the period's art, followed by in-depth entries for individual works. This catalog is the first comprehensive study of the Genoese baroque in English and the most current in any language.

The exhibition catalog and other merchandise will be available for purchase in a special installation near the exhibition exit, the West Building Shops, and the East Building Shops; shop.nga.gov; (800) 697-9350 (phone); (202) 789-3047 (fax); or customer.service@nga.gov.

Update: January 9, 2020

This update includes an additional exhibition sponsor and related program.

Update: March 11, 2020

This update includes information pertaining to the postponement of the exhibition and its related programming.

Update: July 24, 2020

This update includes updated exhibition dates.

Update: December 15, 2020

This update includes updated dates for the exhibition tour.

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