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IN THE LIGHT OF CARAVAGGIO: DUTCH AND FLEMISH PAINTINGS FROM SOUTHEASTERN MUSEUMS
OPENS AT THE MUSCARELLE MUSEUM OF ART IN FEBRUARY

REMBRANDT AND THE UTRECHT REALISTS FEATURED IN MAJOR EXHIBITION

Exhibition Dates: February 10 – May 13, 2018

Williamsburg, Va. (December 20, 2017) – The Muscarelle Museum of Art at the College of William & Mary proudly announces the opening of ***In the Light of Caravaggio: Dutch and Flemish Paintings from Southeastern Museums***, on February 10, 2018. This extraordinary exhibition presents sixteen important paintings by the Dutch and Flemish Old Masters – including the young Rembrandt – who were inspired by the art unveiled in Rome by Caravaggio around 1600. The individualism, sensuality, dramatic shadows and resolute realism of these paintings became famous throughout Europe. ***In the Light of Caravaggio*** includes major examples by Dirck van Baburen, Gerrit van Honthorst, Hendrick ter Brugghen, Matthias Stomer and other 'Dutch Caravaggists', as they are called, who traveled from the city of Utrecht to study and begin their careers in Rome.

Rembrandt stands out among the stay-at-home Dutch masters who learned about the latest trends from his compatriots. In Amsterdam during the early 1630s, he painted several works in a homespun, almost rugged, realism, unmistakably influenced by Caravaggio's innovations. The *Portrait of a Forty-Year-Old Woman*, 1634, lent by the Speed Art Museum in Louisville, is an outstanding example. The Muscarelle exhibition offers a rare opportunity to view an original Rembrandt as none of his paintings are in Virginia museums.

Among other highlights is a recognized masterpiece by ter Brugghen, who is considered the most expressive of the Dutch Caravaggists. In *The Bagpipe Player*, 1624, lent by the National Gallery of Art, the strongly contrasted figure of a simple musician is portrayed with a dignity and monumentality that deeply impressed Rembrandt.

Ter Brugghen worked in the studio of Dirck van Baburen, another major Utrecht master. Van Baburen's *Narcissus*, recently acquired by the Muscarelle, is a vivid and amusing example of the Caravaggesque tendency to stage the classical myths in contemporary dress. In his *Narcissus*, c. 1621, the mythological hunter who fell in love with his own reflection has the brawny features of a Dutch youth.

The wide spectrum of the themes preferred – and made famous – by Michelangelo Merisi, called Caravaggio (1571 – 1610), and his Netherlandish followers, are represented in the exhibition, ranging from the profane to the sacred: from the wide expanse of a boisterous tavern by Theodoor Rombouts to the Silent Night intimacy of the *Adoration of the Shepherds* in separate paintings by Matthias Stomer and Pieter Fransz De Grebber; and from the gaudy costumes of *Feast of Esther* by Jan Lievens, Rembrandt's early partner, to the unashamed frankness of Adam and Eve discussing the apple by Jan van Bijlert.

In the Light of Caravaggio, a cooperative effort between six American museums, will feature important Dutch and Flemish Caravaggesque paintings from the collections of the National Gallery of Art, North Carolina Museum of Art, Speed Art Museum, Bob Jones University Museum & Gallery, and the Chrysler Museum of Art, together with two recent acquisitions to the permanent collection of the Muscarelle. This exhibition continues the program of

research into the work and influence of Caravaggio on his contemporaries and followers that the Muscarelle Museum of Art initiated with an international symposium on Caravaggio still lifes, followed by the 2013 exhibition of Mattia Preti, the last great follower of Caravaggio, and finally, the international loan exhibition, *Caravaggio Connoisseurship: Saint Francis in Meditation and the Capitoline Fortune Teller* of 2014.

This exhibition is dedicated to the memory of Walter Liedtke, world-renowned scholar of Dutch and Flemish art and Curator of European Paintings at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, who died in 2015.

The Muscarelle exhibition also acknowledges the authoritative and pioneering exhibition, brilliantly curated by Dennis P. Weller, *Sinners & Saints, Darkness & Light: Caravaggio and His Dutch and Flemish Followers* (North Carolina Museum of Art in Raleigh) in 1998. Dr. Weller will give a free public lecture on this theme on February 15, 2018 as part of the Third Thursday Lecture Series at the Muscarelle.

About the Artists

Painters such as Dirck van Baburen, Gerrit van Honthorst, Hendrick ter Brugghen, Jan van Bijlert and Matthias Stomer all studied in Rome in the 1610s, when the *tenebroso* of Caravaggio's style was incredibly influential. In 1621 Jan van Bijlert was, along with Cornelis van Poelenburgh and Willem Molijn, a founding member of the circle of Dutch and Flemish artists in Rome known as the Bentvueghels. It was the custom among the Bentvueghels to adopt a nickname. Van Bijlert's nickname was "Aeneas". According to surviving documents, the Fleming Abraham Janssens was in Rome in 1598 and again in the spring of 1601. His paintings after his return to Antwerp show knowledge of Italian classical sculpture and the strong *chiaroscuro* and monumental figures of Caravaggio.

About the Muscarelle Museum of Art

Since its founding in 1983, the mission of the Muscarelle Museum of Art has been to integrate and celebrate the role of artistic exploration in the life of William & Mary. Over the last decade, the Muscarelle has grown from a small university art museum to a world-class brand featuring groundbreaking exhibitions such as Michelangelo and Botticelli. The Muscarelle has been voted the Best Art Museum in Virginia by a statewide poll, a reflection of its vital role in both the campus community and surrounding region.

The Muscarelle Museum of Art is located on the campus of William & Mary at 603 Jamestown Rd in Williamsburg, Va. For more information, call 757-221-2700 or visit muscarelle.org. Follow on Twitter (@Muscarelle), Instagram (@muscarellemuseum) or on Facebook (Muscarelle Museum of Art). Admission is \$10 during this exhibition. Admission is free to members, William & Mary students, faculty and staff, as well as children under the age of 12.