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New Book Provides a Fresh Look at the Life and Work of Caravaggio, a Gifted but Controversial Artist

LOS ANGELES— The young Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1571–1610) created a major stir in late-sixteenth-century Rome with the groundbreaking naturalism and highly charged emotionalism of his paintings. One might think, given the vast number of books that have been written about him, that everything that could possibly be said about the artist has been said. In Caravaggio: The Artist and His Work (Getty Publications, $59.95, hardcover), however, author Sybille Ebert-Schifferer argues that it is important to take a fresh look at the often repeated and widely accepted narratives about the artist's life and work.

Ebert-Schifferer subjects the available sources to a critical reevaluation, uncovering evidence that the efforts of Caravaggio's contemporaries to disparage his character and his artwork often sprang from their own cultural biases or a desire to promote the artistic achievements of his rivals. Contrary to repeated claims in the literature, the painter lacked neither education nor piety, but was an extremely accomplished technician who developed a successful marketing strategy. He enjoyed great respect and earned high fees from his prestigious clients while he also inspired a large circle of imitators. Even his brushes with the law conformed to the behavioral norms of the aristocratic Romans he sought to emulate.

The beautiful reproductions of Caravaggio's paintings in this volume make clear why he captivated the imagination of his contemporaries, a reaction that echoes today in the ongoing popularity of his work and the fierce debate that it continues to provoke among art historians.

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About the Author — Sybille Ebert-Schifferer is the director of the Bibliotheca Hertziana at the Max Planck Institute for Art History in Rome. She is the author of Still Life: A History (Abrams, 1999) and co-editor of Sacred Possessions: Collecting Italian Religious Art, 1500–1900 (Getty Publications, 2010).

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Sybille Ebert-Schifferer
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