

PRESS RELEASE

GUIDO RENI THE DIVINE

23 NOVEMBER 2022 TO 5 MARCH 2023

Exhibition annex

Press Preview: Tuesday, 22 November 2022, 11 am

Frankfurt am Main, 19 October 2022. With a large-scale exhibition opening to the public on 23 November 2022, the Städel Museum is rediscovering the former star painter of the Italian Baroque: Guido Reni (1575–1642). In his day, Reni was one of the most successful and celebrated painters in all of Europe, coveted by the most important patrons, including the Borghese Pope Paul V, the Duke of Mantua, and the Queen of England. Hardly appreciated in the nineteenth century due to other aesthetic preferences and later relegated to second place by the one-sided concentration on his temporary rival Caravaggio, he no longer holds the place he deserves in the public consciousness.

For the first time in over thirty years, the Städel Museum, in cooperation with the Museo Nacional del Prado in Madrid, is bringing together more than 130 of his fascinating paintings, drawings, and prints and thus offering a new perspective on Guido Reni. The painter was deeply religious and also superstitious, tremendously successful and hopelessly addicted to gambling, as one contemporary biography authoritatively informs us. Even during his lifetime, Reni was given the honourable epithet *Il divino* (“The Divine”) – this refers to his fame as an artist star who, aware of his skills, occasionally behaved like a diva. However, “The Divine” also refers to his themes: Reni is *the* painter of the divine par excellence. He had a profound effect on the religious iconography of European art and, like no-one else before or since, gave visual form to the beauty of the divine – be it the Christian kingdom of heaven or the world of the ancient gods. The enormous impact of his art is reflected in the countless variations of his depictions of the heads of Christ and Mary, with their upturned faces and heavenward gaze, reproductions of which still circulate widely today as picture pull-outs in Roman Catholic prayer books. Indeed, this unparalleled imitative reception history only served to tarnish Reni’s image, obscuring the actual qualities and other fascinating aspects of his art.

The exhibition is supported by the Gemeinnützige Kulturfonds Frankfurt RheinMain GmbH and the Städtischer Museums-Verein e.V.

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In addition to major works from the Städel Museum's collection, such as the pivotal early copper panel *Assumption of the Virgin* (c. 1598/99) and the recently restored *Christ at the Column* (c. 1604), the exhibition features spectacular works from over 60 international museums and private collections, including the Museo Nacional del Prado in Madrid, the Pinacoteca Nazionale di Bologna, the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, LACMA and the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Louvre in Paris. Added to this comes a string of newly discovered and never-before-exhibited works by the artist. Interspersed throughout this survey of Guido's art are select images by the role models and contemporaries who influenced his practice (Raphael, Parmigianino, and Annibale Carracci, for instance) as well as rare historical documents, such as Reni's revealing account book for the years 1609–1612.

"The Städel Museum's exhibition *Guido Reni. The Divine* represents the first opportunity in more than 30 years for the public to rediscover the former star of Italian Baroque painting. Thanks to our generous lenders and sponsors, we have been able to put together a presentation of more than 130 autograph paintings, drawings, and etchings – the largest ensemble of his art ever gathered in one place. Guido Reni towered over European Baroque painting. But his reception history has long caused other fascinating aspects of his art to be unfairly overlooked. And it is precisely these aspects that now lie at the heart of our exhibition today and which demonstrate why he was the most successful and most famous painter in 17th-century Italy," declares **Philipp Demandt**, director of the Städel Museum.

Sylvia von Metzler, chairwoman of the board of the Städtischer Museums-Verein e.V., says: "Our over 9,000 members put their commitment and passion into supporting the Städel Museum in all its undertakings – and 2014 was no exception, with the acquisition of Guido Reni's masterpiece, the *Assumption of the Virgin*, to mark the museum's 200th anniversary. We are very proud that this painting now forms the springboard to the major Guido Reni exhibition. It is a programmatic work of impressive quality, and the first in a series of further paintings on the same subject by Reni. This is a unique moment, with the Städel Museum's *Assumption of the Virgin* going on view for the first time together with its counterparts from Madrid's Prado Museum and London's National Gallery."

"Reni was a visionary. The outstanding qualities of his art were already highly appreciated by his contemporaries. This show is the first to directly juxtapose autograph paintings with Reni's works on paper, and, being the result of years of art-historical scholarship, it also presents the latest findings of that scholarly endeavour. And in all of this, Reni's place in art history and his development as an artist play as important a role as the diversity of his pictorial tropes, especially when it comes to his religious subjects. Guido Reni is, after all, *the painter of the divine vision*: like no other artist, he gave vivid form to the celestial. With

this exhibition, we show how the ‘divine Guido’ found his transcendent style,” explains curator **Bastian Eclercy**.

The Exhibition

The exhibition is a survey of Guido Reni’s art as told in ten chronological chapters, some centred around a specific theme. Also featured are episodes and recurring motifs from his career and life, most comprehensively revealed in the biography by the Bolognese scholar Carlo Cesare Malvasia (1616–1693), published in 1678.

The **opening chapter** to the exhibition features an ensemble of paintings showing the *Assumption of the Virgin* that are going on view together for the first time and that include the two versions of the *Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin* from circa 1602/03 (Madrid, Museo del Prado) and circa 1607 (London, National Gallery), as well as the later variation on the same theme, the large-scale *Immaculate Conception* of 1627 (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art). The subject runs throughout Reni’s entire oeuvre and was a trope he returned to time and again. The Städel Museum is home to his earliest version of the *Assumption*, dating from around 1598/99, which contains the seeds of all subsequent versions and bears witness to Reni’s revolutionary approach to visualizing this subject. As a programmatic image expressing his artistic ambitions, it perfectly encapsulates what Malvasia calls the “heavenly ideas” that so impressed Reni’s contemporaries. In addition to this exemplary introduction to Reni’s work, the opening section also presents the painter’s complex personality – for example in the form of portraits and the account book that he kept in his own hand (1609–1612; New York, Morgan Library & Museum), a rare document now shown for the first time.

Around 1584, while still a boy in his hometown of **Bologna**, Reni entered the workshop of Denys Calvaert (1540–1619). Ten years later, he fell out with his master and subsequently joined the Carracci Academy in 1595, spending three years there. The Carracci let him take on smaller commissions and keep the earnings himself. The exhibition presents his first altarpieces and devotional pictures as well as virtuoso chalk drawings created during these years. These early works illustrate how Reni found a visual vocabulary that was completely his own by combining the late Mannerism of Calvaert, the innovative painting style of the Carracci, and his study of past artists, above all the great masters of the High Renaissance, Raphael (1483–1520) and Parmigianino (1503–1540).

In 1601 Reni moved to **Rome**; these frenetic years broadened his horizons and had a lasting influence on his style. Rome is where several important commissions from Cardinal Paolo Emilio Sfondrati came his way, and where he met both Caravaggio (1571–1610) and the Cavalier d’Arpino (1568–1640), who took him under his wing and who, according to Malvasia, sought to set him up as the “anti-Caravaggio”, his antidote and antithesis. Despite this, for a few brief years, 1604 to 1606, Reni belonged to the first wave of

Caravaggisti, albeit putting his own, thoughtful spin on the Lombard artist's startling style. Reni's recently restored masterpiece *Christ at the Column* (c. 1604), in the collection of the Städel Museum, demonstrates Caravaggio's formative influence, as do the large altarpiece the *Martyrdom of Saint Catherine* (c. 1606; Albenga, Museo Diocesano) and the *David with the Head of Goliath* (c. 1605/06; Orléans, Musée des Beaux-Arts), which simultaneously shows Reni drawing inspiration from ancient sculpture.

It was not long before Reni had risen to the top in Rome, becoming the city's leading painter. In the years 1607 to 1614 he effectively worked as 'court painter' for the Borghese pope, Paul V, and his powerful cardinal-nephew Scipione Borghese. Reni was tasked with carrying out a series of major **fresco projects** for the Borghese: in the Vatican Palace, in San Gregorio Magno, the Quirinal Palace, and Santa Maria Maggiore, as well as the *Aurora* fresco in the Palazzo Pallavicini Rospigliosi, which swiftly became the seminal work of so-called Baroque Classicism. The exhibition presents Reni's legacy as a fresco painter through a selection of drawings for these projects, including his composition studies in pen and ink as well as detailed studies in chalk, which impressively demonstrate Reni's compositional practice and virtuoso draughtsmanship.

In 1614 Reni decided to return to Bologna and, after a thirteen-year absence, had to establish himself there as an important painter. He distilled what he had learned from working in Rome into a powerful, monumental, and wholly singular style, with individual figures or small figure groups with a near-sculptural presence usually set against a darkened background. This **prima maniera** (to use another term coined by Malvasia) displays the fruits of his study of Caravaggio, for example in such half-figure paintings as *Lot and His Daughters* (c. 1614/15; London, National Gallery). As the recently rediscovered *Conversion of Saul* (c. 1616–1619; El Escorial) shows, he also explored the Mannerist tradition of his teachers.

Reni's "expressive heads" (*arie di teste*) in black and red chalk with their **heavenward gaze** depicted a state of spiritual rapture and transcendence and were already much admired during the artist's own lifetime. This motif of the upturned gaze in a moment of divine communion rapidly became the painter's oft-imitated 'signature piece'. Masterful chalk drawings and several paintings in the exhibition trace the evolution of this pathos formula, inspired by the faces of certain ancient sculptures. Reni also engaged with Raphael's head studies as well as character heads portraying extreme emotions and the marks of old age.

In the years of his *prima maniera*, Reni repeatedly represented the **male nude**, for instance in the form of Bacchus, Samson, or Apollo, in a series of large-format paintings in which the figure is rendered more like a piece of free-standing sculpture with few accessory figures crowding the scene. Tautly muscular bodies in graceful, flowing poses,

as in *Hippomenes and Atalanta* (c. 1615–1618; Madrid, Museo del Prado) or *Bacchus and Ariadne* (c. 1614–1616; Los Angeles County Museum of Art), reveal his profound engagement with both ancient forms and life study.

The late 1620s saw a shift in Reni's style, as his palette became increasingly lighter. This **seconda maniera** was the product of a tendency to now apply the colours more freely, a softening of his earlier chiaroscuro, and his favouring of 'silvery' tints. His extensive use of lead-white gave his later paintings a hitherto unknown porcelaneous radiance, as evidenced in visionary scenes in which the light enters from an oblique angle, such as in the *Vision of Saint Andrea Corsini* (c. 1629/30; Florence, Uffizi). A favourite motif in this period is the suffering yet physically unscathed Christ, as shown in his *Christ on the Cross* (1636; Modena, Galleria Estense). Reni also repeatedly depicted mythological themes, in works such as *Hercules and the Hydra* (c. 1635–1640; Florence, Galleria Palatina) and *Cupid* (c. 1637/38; Madrid, Museo del Prado).

In all his creative phases, Reni was also active as a **printmaker**. The nearly 40 etchings by his own hand were not copies of his paintings but were made as works in their own right. The Städel Museum has impressions of almost every etching and is displaying them for the first time. A copy after Parmigianino's *Entombment of Christ* (1524–1526) stands as a homage to the master Reni so admired, whose easeful etching technique he adopted through copying.

An important group of paintings has survived from the very last years of Guido Reni's life. All unfinished to varying degrees, they provide a fascinating insight into the painter's working method. These canvases reveal a remarkably fluid and free handling of the paint, while now the chosen palette is severely restrained, veering towards the monochrome, as best illustrated in the *Penitent Magdalene* (c. 1635; Baltimore, The Walters Art Museum). Certain passages in these works, for example *Salome with the Head of John the Baptist* (c. 1638–1642; The Art Institute of Chicago), remain sketch-like. It is debatable whether these **non-finito late works** are in fact 'finished' – paintings deliberately executed in a cursory manner – or truly 'unfinished' paintings (*abbozzi*) that amount to brush sketches yet to be worked-up, in which the colour has merely been laid in. As the exhibition shows, both phenomena can be observed: Reni often 'stockpiled' pictures, commencing work on numerous canvases at once and postponing their completion. That said, however, we also see him deliberately using and enjoying the *non finito* as an artistic means. These fascinating paintings mark a painterly *finale furioso* in the concluding chapter of his body of work.

An exhibition of the Städel Museum in cooperation with the Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid

GUIDO RENI. THE DIVINE

Curator: Dr Bastian Eclercy (Head of Italian, French and Spanish Paintings before 1800, Städel Museum)

Project coordinator: Aleksandra Rentzsch (Research Assistant in Italian, French and Spanish Paintings before 1800, Städel Museum)

Exhibition dates: 23 November 2022 to 5 March 2023

Location: Städel Museum, Schaumainkai 63, 60596 Frankfurt am Main

Information: www.staedelmuseum.de

Visitor Services: +49(0)69-605098-200, info@staedelmuseum.de

Tickets and admission: Tickets can be booked online at shop.staedelmuseum.de/en. Tue–Fri: 16€, reduced 14€, Sat, Sun, and public holidays: 18€, reduced 16€; free admission for children under 12; groups of 10 or more (non-concession adults): 14€ per person, however 16€ per person on weekends. All groups are required to book their visit in advance by contacting us at +49(0)69-605098-200 or info@staedelmuseum.de.

General guided tours of the exhibition (in German): Tue 1 pm / Wed 1 pm / Thu 6 pm / Fri 4 pm / Sat 11 am and 4 pm (not on 10 December at 4 pm) / Sun 11 am and 4pm (not on 5 February at 4 pm) as well as Mon 26 December at 11 am; accessible guided tours on Sat 10 December and Sun 5 February at 4 pm.

Tickets for the general guided tours are available exclusively via the online shop at shop.staedelmuseum.de/en. Current information about guided tours, special offers on public holidays, and opening hours are posted on www.staedelmuseum.de/en.

Catalogue: Accompanying the exhibition is a richly illustrated catalogue, edited by Bastian Eclercy and featuring a foreword by Philipp Demandt and contributions by Stefan Albl, Maria Aresin, Hans Aurenhammer, Lilly Becker, Babette Bohn, Aoife Brady, Heiko Damm, Corentin Dury, Sybille Ebert-Schifferer, Bastian Eclercy, Theresa Gatarski, Francesco Gatta, Mareike Gerken, Andreas Henning, Julia Katz, Raffaella Morselli, Elisabeth Oy-Marra, Catherine Puglisi, Andreas Raub, Aleksandra Rentzsch, Alexander Röstel, Letizia Treves, Samuel Vitali, and Linda Wolk-Simon. Available in German or English, 328 pages, €39.90 (museum bookshop price) / general retail edition available from Hatje Cantz.

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Audio-guide app: The audio-guide provides insights into the oeuvre of Guido Reni, one-time star painter of the Italian Baroque. Strong emotions and suspenseful action characterize his works. His special trademark was the heavenward gaze. The vivid portrayals of Guido Reni and his art by the German-Italian TV presenter Ingo Zamperoni make the audio-guide a vivid listening experience. With a playtime of approximately 60 minutes, the app comprises audio tracks on many of the works in the exhibition along with illustrations. Available from Apple's App Store and Google Play. The tour is available as a free app for both iOS and Android operating systems and can be downloaded to a smartphone from the comfort of your home or on the day of your visit using the Städel's Wi-Fi network. The audio-guide is also available in the museum via hireable handhelds, at a fee of €5 (or €8 for two).

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