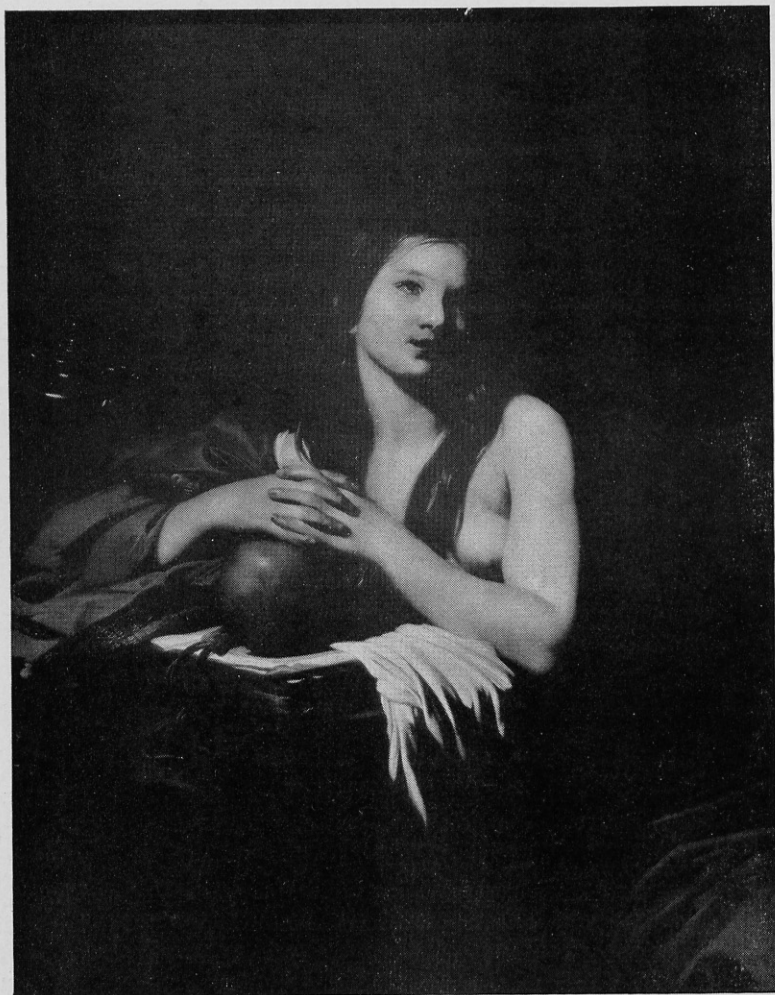


Bulletin of
The Detroit Institute of Arts
of the City of Detroit



THE REPENTANT MAGDALEN
NICCOLO RENIERI
C. 1590-1667
GIFT OF MRS. TRENT MCMATH

THE REPENTANT MAGDALEN BY NICCOLO RENIERI

It is curious that French painting, which is so well known in some periods of its long history, is in others very little known. No field of art, surely, is better known than the French nineteenth century, but it is only recently that we have begun to realize the seventeenth century, too, was a great cycle and, in addition to the two great figures of Poussin and Claude Lorrain, was filled with interesting and differing personalities. We have been fortunate to add to the museum's collections in the last two years two paintings, *The Girl with the Candle* by Georges de la Tour, described in the Bulletin of last March, and *The Repentant Magdalen*¹ by Niccolo Renieri (Nicolas Regnier) (c. 1590-1667), the gift of Mrs. Trent McMath, which will represent in our collection one of the newly discovered aspects of that century.

Both of these artists illustrate in different ways the response of the French to the art of Caravaggio, whose potent influence, spreading throughout Europe in the second and third decades of the seventeenth century, was a source and inspiration of some of the greatest painting in that great age of painting. Caravaggio's influence was the means by which the baroque style finally reached France. At the beginning of the seventeenth century there were few indications that France was about to enter an important period of art. The sixteenth century had been distinguished by the eagerness of the Valois monarchs to patronize art and by the lack of artists to patronize. There were the portrait painters, it is true, but to decorate Fontainebleau it was necessary to import Italians for lack of French artists who could use the complex and splendid decorative

style which was developing in Italy. Nor was the school of Fontainebleau able to perpetuate a baroque style in France. In the early seventeenth century it was necessary for Marie de Medici and Louis XIII to bring Rubens from Antwerp to decorate the Luxembourg in the baroque manner. The baroque was first mastered by the artists inspired by Caravaggio, the *tenebrosi*, and this too is curious for the qualities of Caravaggio's art were not at all in harmony with the native genius of France. The rise of the seventeenth century French school is thus a kind of duel between the powerful realism and violent contrasts of tone of *tenebrism* and the idealism, restraint and formal elegance of the French nature.

Renieri was one of the French *tenebrosi*, as were Valentin, Vouet and Georges de la Tour. The reactions of these French artists to Caravaggio's art were all quite different. Valentin de Boulogne remained in Rome and practised a dignified if not exceptional kind of baroque genre. In Lorraine, Georges de la Tour, whose source of contact with *tenebrism* is still a mystery, created out of Caravaggio's artificial lighting a new and entirely original art. Simon Vouet, summoned back from Rome to Paris by the order of Louis XIII, brought with him an Italian wife and an immense reputation based upon his Italian studies, but soon degenerated into a cold and mediocre painter. Renieri remained in Italy, as did Poussin and Claude Lorrain also, but his work remains as French as that of these greater contemporaries. His fame in his own day was as a portrait painter. His religious and allegorical subjects were for a long time confused with

Caravaggio's, and it is to the recent publications of H. Voss, the well-known German scholar of the baroque, that we owe the clarification of his personality.² He is one of the Franco-Flemish artists who have played so important a part in French art. He was born at Maubeuge about 1590 and first studied under Abraham Janssens at Antwerp. About 1615 he appears in Rome in the circle of the Marchese Vincenzo Guistiniani, the great patron who had first recognized Caravaggio. His connection with *tenebrism* seems to have been through Manfredi, the Roman painter whom French and Flemish seem most to have favored; but all Rome was then following Caravaggio's realism and violent lighting. The accession of the Barberini pope, Urban VIII, in 1623, brought, however, the victory of the rival Bolognese school and many of the *tenebroso* scattered to other places. Renieri went in 1626 to Venice, which also received Saraceni. A few details of his life there have been preserved. A self portrait in a German private collection³ shows a handsome and courtly figure at work at a portrait on an easel; and the historian Boschini, who knew him, speaks of his agreeable manners and courtly art. His house in Venice was noted for its hospitality. No doubt four beautiful daughters, whom he liked to use as models, had something to do with its popularity. Two of these famous beauties were painters, Angelica and Clorinda (who married the painter Pietro Vecchia); another, Lucrezia, married the painter Daniel van Dyck.

Renieri's work falls into two periods, the first in which he used the idiom of Caravaggio so well that his works were afterward confused with those of Caravaggio, and a later phase

in which he came under the influence of the Bolognese and especially of Guido Reni. It is interesting that although he lived for forty years in Venice he shows no trace of Venetian influence, in contrast to Poussin, who learned so much from the Venetians.

The Repentant Magdalen, which was once called a Caravaggio, was first recognized by Voss as a notable example of Renieri's earlier and best period. The single figure, illuminated against a dark background by a strong beam of light, is characteristic of the artist, who was more interested in the harmony of the single figure than in group compositions. The essence of the baroque was movement combined with ardor and vitality of mood: Renieri, with his traits of Flemish realism and French elegance, used the great language of his day with a special personal accent. There is a suavity and elegance in this dreaming figure, so vehement yet flowing and relaxed in pose, which is the mark of the French baroque. The self absorption of the saint in her prayer is finely understood. The vivid grace of every gesture, the pearly tone of the pale skin, the way in which the streaming hair is drawn about the head and shoulders, is very individual and well done. And the open books and skull and ointment jar are painted with the solid vigor of a Jordaens. The model is one of the artist's daughters, as one may see by comparing her very special type of features with the models in other paintings by Renieri, such as the *Vanitas* in Stuttgart (who holds the same ointment jar), the *Allegory of Sculpture* in the Schlossmuseum, Berlin, and with the artist's own features in his *Self Portrait*.

E. P. RICHARDSON.

1. Canvas: H. 48 inches; W. 38 inches. Reg. No. 38.67.

2. H. Voss: *Malerei des Barock in Rom*, 1924; *Zeitschrift für bild. Kunst*, LVIII (1924/5) 122.

3. Voss: *Zeitschrift für bild. Kunst*, LXV (1931-2) 161.

THE STANDARD BEARER BY ALBRECHT DÜRER

The splendid exhibition of engravings and etchings by Albrecht Dürer from the collection of Mr. Lessing J. Rosenwald of Philadelphia gave Detroit its first complete view of the work of this master. Those who are familiar with the Print Collection of the Institute know that in the gift of Mrs. Harriet J. Scripps there was included the famous set of engravings in wood known as *The Apocalypse*, the most popular of the Dürer engravings. This gift included also *Adam and Eve*, *The Little Passion*, and some of the wood engravings from *The Life of the Virgin*.

The recent purchase of *The Standard Bearer* adds to our print collection one of the early copper engravings of Dürer. The monogram which Dürer adopted as a kind of trademark to protect himself against those who sought to pirate his work, appears on the print, but the exact date of publication is unknown. Three of the leading authorities on Dürer differ as to the year in which this engraving was made. Retberg gives its publication as before 1500, Heller between the years 1500 and 1506, and Hausman after the year 1506. Thausing writes that *The Standard Bearer* is evidently an early, original work of Dürer's, the St. Andrew's Cross of the Golden Fleece on the standard which belonged to Maximilian I as Duke of Burgundy pointing without doubt to the war of 1499.

Most of the engraved work of Dürer concerns itself with religious themes. This was natural in an age which knew deep spiritual disquiet, and Dürer the artist but expressed the mood of his time. He was concerned, too, with the daily life about him, and the theory that he was urged by his

practical wife to produce prints which would have an immediate appeal is a reasonable one. With Europe filled with fear at the thought of a Turkish invasion, the engraving of a soldier of Maximilian would be a most popular subject. *The Standard Bearer* was doubtless such a print.

In his engravings on copper, Dürer had greater freedom in expressing himself than in the engravings on wood. In the latter, though he made the designs, the actual cutting was done by skilled artisans; the engravings on copper were made by his own hand. In *The Standard Bearer* we have a simpler treatment of line than we find in most of Dürer's engravings. It has the set regularity which is characteristic of all his work, and he used only such shading as was needed to define the figure. The landscape backgrounds which delight us in such engravings as *The Prodigal Son*, *The Madonna of the Monkey* and others, is lacking here. Three minute ships are indicated, and beyond them a low mountain. The figure of the soldier is drawn with careful accuracy, and the stump of the tree on the soldier's left shows the care for detail which Dürer felt when representing all forms of nature.

In the engraving of *Adam and Eve* Dürer sought to give the natural beauty of the human form. He had struggled earnestly to evolve a canon of human proportion which should be scientific and absolute, but he attempted the impossible. *The Standard Bearer* set no such problem. Dürer's aim was doubtless to give a realistic portrait of a popular figure. The print is interesting because it is a simple study by a master whose complexity of thought and intricate line



THE STANDARD BEARER
 (SLIGHTLY ENLARGED)
 ALBRECHT DÜRER
 1471-1528
 GIFT OF THE FOUNDERS SOCIETY

baffles many print students.

It is important because from this early work we realize how steadily his power over his burin grew. Dürer

stands today unrivalled as an engraver who combined technical excellence with a great imaginative quality.

ISABEL WEADOCK



ITALIAN LANDSCAPE, AGNUZZO
 CARL HOFER
 1878.
 GIFT OF MRS. EDGAR R. THOM

A LANDSCAPE BY CARL HOFER

A third work by the contemporary German painter Carl Hofer has been added to the collection of modern paintings as the gift of Mrs. Edgar R. Thom. The painting, *Italian Landscape, Agnuzzo*¹, rounds out our examples of Hofer's art by adding to our *Portrait Head* and *Still Life* a landscape of remarkable power.

Although the importance of Hofer's contribution to modern art is uncontested, and his place as one of the most original yet comprehensible painters is firmly established, very little has been written of his aims, for until 1931 his paintings were not generally known outside Germany. Since last year, when *The Wind* (recently brought to Detroit by Dr. George Kamperman) won first prize at the Carnegie International in Pittsburgh, interest has increased to the

point where a definition of his intentions is much to be desired.

In March, 1931, a large exhibition of Hofer's paintings, forty canvases as well as drawings and watercolors, dating from 1922, was held at the Alfred Flechtheim Gallery in Berlin. Though the artist confessed the task "repugnant", he wrote a short preface to the catalogue which remains, until a new autobiographical account appears, one of the few "primary sources" for an evaluation of his style. He said at that time:

"We stand today at one of the great turning-points of culture, one unfelt by the majority. Our points of view are fluctuating. A new, deeper, and subjective approach to nature has created new forms of art, and the events of our innermost spiritual experience clamor for tangible expres-

sion. During the past five years my principal task has been to achieve, by artistic means, the purely pictorial aspect of these perceptions of form and color.

My character was solidly anchored in traditional forms, within whose bounds I endeavored to express my personality. Rejected by the opinions of a new order, these forms are no longer adequate, but where I can use them I try to fill them with new life For me no difference exists in principle between non-objective and objective representation. If a picture has been experienced and created according to the rules of graphic counterpoint, it is immaterial whether its theme is form visually or intuitively apprehended. The entire gamut of possible expression and representation lies between the objective and non-objective methods, and I claim artistic license for the artist who feels attracted to them, so that he may make use of these manifold opportunities.

For me each picture has its own laws; I try to develop its form from the inmost nature of the thing painted. It will differ characteristically from the next picture, for only paintings done from the same sequence of images can be similar I want my work to be known, not only by its exterior peculiarities: color, "palette", or uniqueness, but by its spiritual affinity and intrinsic consistency I profess no theories, for then I should have to carry them to their conclusion, which is to say, *ad absurdum*. Degree of novelty is for me no criterion of value".

Hofer's own words thus define his

art as being neither eclectic nor revolutionary, but a mean between the two, utilizing the meritorious in each. The value of past forms lies in their familiarity and recognizability; contemporary, or rather non-objective art is to be valued for its delineation of abstract emotions felt rather concrete things seen. The task of the modern artist is to synthesize what can be used of the legacy of the past without sacrificing the applicability of his work to the present.

Hofer was born at Karlsruhe, October 11, 1878. He studied there under Stanislaus Kalckreuth and Hans Thoma, both realist painters of landscape; from the latter he inherited much of the 19th century love of nature in which man finds distraction from his own kind. He went to Rome in 1903, and in Paris, in 1908, he became acquainted with Cezanne, in whose efforts to reduce nature to its simplest components, rendering them stable and permanent, he found the source of his personal style. In the post-war years, when the search for an uninvolved re-statement of fact was coupled with a new penetration into the emotional effects of non-imitative expression, Hofer has transcribed nature as simply as possible, but has animated it, by means of suggestive color and necessary distortion, so that while remaining altogether recognizable visually, what he paints, whether it be landscape, figures, or still life, conveys more clearly that if it were literally rendered the artist's personal reactions.

PARKER IESLEY.

CALENDAR FOR MARCH

EXHIBITIONS

Mar. 1—16: Contemporary Swedish Prints.

Alger House: Mar. 1—15: Prints by French and German Masters of the 20th Century; Mar. 15—Apr. 16: Paintings and Drawings by Angna Enters.

TUESDAY EVENING LECTURES

Given by the museum staff in cooperation with the Archaeological Society of Detroit, Tuesday evenings at 8:30 in the lecture hall.

Mar. 7: *Manet and the Impressionists*, by Ernst Scheyer.

Mar. 14: *Textile Art of Old Peru*, by Adele Coulin Weibel.

Mar. 21: *Christ in Mediaeval Art*, by Parker Lesley.

Mar. 28: *The Hittites*, by Hetty Goldman, the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, N. J.

Apr. 4: *Landscape Etching*, by Isabel Weadock.

LECTURES IN THE GALLERIES

(chairs provided)

A Survey of the Collections, Thursday afternoons at 3:00; Sundays at 2:30.

Mar. 2—5: *The Dutch Masters, II*.

Mar. 9—12: *The Eighteenth Century in France*.

Mar. 16—19: *The Eighteenth Century in England and America*.

Mar. 23—26: *Arts and Crafts of the Early American Republic*.

Mar. 30—Apr. 2: *The First American Landscapes*.

SPECIAL TALKS BY THE CURATORS

Friday afternoons at 3:00

Mar. 3: *Persian Fabrics and Embroideries*, Adele Coulin Weibel.

Mar. 10: *The Baroque*, by E. P. Richardson.

Mar. 17: *Venetian Painting of the Renaissance*, E. P. Richardson.

Mar. 24: *French and German Gothic Sculpture*, by Parker Lesley.

Mar. 31: *Far Eastern Fabrics and Embroideries*, by Adele Coulin Weibel.

Apr. 7: Good Friday — no lecture.