

PETIT PALAIS
5 NOVEMBRE 2024
– 23 FÉVRIER 2025

VILLE DE PARIS

RIBERA
TÉNÈBRES ET LUMIÈRE

PARIS MUSÉES

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INAC **Beaux Arts Magazine** **LA CROIX** **RADIO CLASSIQUE** **Le Point** **GRUPE BPCE**

JUSEPE DE RIBERA, SAINT JÉRÔME ET L'ANGE DU JUGEMENT DERNIER, 1624, HUILE SUR TOILE, 26x34,4 CM. MUSÉE ET REAL BOSCO DI CARPOINTE, NAPLES, SU CONCESSIONE DELL'INAC - MUSÉE ET REAL BOSCO DI CARPOINTE, NAPLES, SU CONCESSIONE DELL'INAC - MUSÉE ET REAL BOSCO DI CARPOINTE, NAPLES, SU CONCESSIONE DELL'INAC - MUSÉE ET REAL BOSCO DI CARPOINTE, NAPLES, SU CONCESSIONE DELL'INAC

October 2024

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Press contacts

Mathilde Beaujard
mathilde.beaujard@paris.fr
+33 (0)1 53 43 40 14
+33 (0)6 45 84 43 35

Ximun Diharce
ximun.diharce@paris.fr
+33 (0)1 53 43 40 23

International press
Claudine Colin Communication,
a Finn Partners society
Alexandre Holin
alexandre@claudinecolin.com
+33 (0)1 42 72 60 01

RIBERA (1591-1652)

Shadows and Light

5 November 2024 - 23 February 2025



Jusepe de Ribera, *Saint Jerome and the Angel of Judgement*, 1626. Oil on canvas, 262×164 cm. Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Naples. Su concessione del MiC – Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte © Archivio dell'arte/Luciano et Marco Pedicini.

The Petit Palais is presenting the first French retrospective ever devoted to Jusepe de Ribera (1591-1652), the terrible heir to Caravaggio, whom his contemporaries considered 'darker and more ferocious' than the great Italian master. Of Spanish origin, he spent his entire career in Italy, first in Rome and then in Naples.

For Ribera, every painting - be it of a beggar, a philosopher or a Pietà - stems from reality, which he transposes into his own language. The gestures are theatrical, the colours black or flamboyant, the realism crude and the chiaroscuro dramatic. With the same acuity, he translates the dignity of everyday life as well as shocking scenes of torture. This extreme tenebrism earned him an immense reputation in the 19th century, from Baudelaire to Manet.

With over a hundred paintings, drawings and prints from all over the world, the exhibition retraces Ribera's entire career for the first time: the intense Roman years, which have only recently been rediscovered, and the ambitious Neapolitan period, which led to his meteoric rise to fame. One thing is clear: Ribera stands out as one of the earliest and boldest interpreters of the Caravaggesque revolution, and beyond that as one of the leading artists of the Baroque age.

The exhibition follows the thread of Ribera's career in the heart of Caravaggio's Italy, while exploring his unique originality and audacity, and his recurring motifs and metamorphoses.

The first section explores Ribera's early career in Rome. The painter—nicknamed "Lo Spagnoletto [the little Spaniard]"—arrived in the papal city around 1605-1606, the same year that Caravaggio left for Naples. Did the two artists ever meet? While no one can say for sure, it is certain that Caravaggio had a significant influence on Ribera, as well as a whole generation of painters living in Rome at that time. During this period in Rome, Ribera developed the foundations of his painting: the use of the live model, a dramatic chiaroscuro, theatrical gestures, a raw realism, and the representation of half-length figures that strike the viewer with their impressive frontality. This new radical vocabulary may be seen in his series on the five senses, represented in the exhibition by *Allegory of Taste* (Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford) and *Allegory of Smell* (Abello Collection, Madrid). It is also evident in *the Apostolados*, a series on the apostles—one of the painter's preferred subjects. The exhibition revisits the history of the reattribution of the painting of *The Judgement of Solomon* (Galleria Borghese) to Ribera by art historian Gianni Papi in 2002. This investigation contributed to revolutionizing the understanding of Ribera's Roman production, enriching it with some sixty masterful works, including *Christ Among the Doctors* (Musées de Langres) and *The Denial of Saint Peter* (Galleria Corsini). By the end of his stay in Rome, Ribera had established himself as one of the most appreciated and prized Caravaggio-style painters amongst the elite of the art world.

In 1616, the artist left Rome for Naples, then a Spanish territory. His career was dazzling. Married to the daughter of one of the city's most important painters, and supported by the powers in place, Ribera reigned over the Neapolitan art scene for almost forty years and received a number of prestigious commissions. The series he produced for the Collegiate Church of Osuna near Seville or for the Church of the Trinità delle Monache in Naples yielded several masterpieces, such as *Saint Jerome and the Angel of Judgement* (Museo di Capodimonte). An artist unrivalled in his ability to transcribe an almost tactile reality of individuals, flesh or objects, Ribera depicted ordinary or unlikely figures with overwhelming acuity and splendour. *A Beggar* (Galleria Borghese), *The Old Usurer* (Prado) or *The Club-Footed Boy* (Louvre) are all transformed into noble subjects under his brush. His interest in people on the margins of society, merged with his taste for the unusual, gave rise to powerful images, such as the famous *Portrait of Magdalena Venturi*, also known as *The Bearded Lady* (Prado).


As part of the Neapolitan section, the public can also discover his talents as a designer and engraver—rather rare skills within the Caravaggio galaxy—with a graphic arts display bringing together exceptional loans from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the British Museum, and the Colomer Collection. His highly skilled engraved work is presented thanks to the Dutuit Collection at the Petit Palais.

Ribera's taste for a radical realism was also reflected in his desire to paint pathos in a natural, unadorned manner. He insisted on the truth of bodies and flesh, even when he depicted the dying Christ in three *Pietàs* brought together here for the first time: the two *Lamentations over the Dead Christ* from the National Gallery in London and the Thyssen Museum, and *The Deposition of Christ* from the Louvre. Alongside his religious compositions, Ribera reinvented ancient myths, illustrating his attraction to the grotesque and his sense of provocation. His palette lightened towards the end of his career, revealing turquoise skies, flamboyant colours, and iridescent fabrics, worthy of Titian, as evident in *Apollo and Marsyas* (Museo di Capodimonte) and *Venus and Adonis* (Palazzo Corsini). The exhibition culminates in a final spectacular room dedicated to scenes of martyrdom and flayings, a subject that also contributed to Ribera's reputation. A veritable theatre of passions, these extreme compositions with their deep blacks, arrest the spectator. The terrible heir to Caravaggio, "darker and fiercer" than the master, demonstrates that he was not a mere interpreter of the former's work, but one of the greatest artists of the Baroque age, with thrilling creations imbued with an audacious virtuosity.

CURATORS

Annick Lemoine, Head Curator, Director of the Petit Palais

Maïté Metz, Curator of Painting and Ancient Graphic Arts, Petit Palais

The exhibition was made possible thanks to the  GROUPE BPCE



Jusepe de Ribera, *Apollo and Marsyas*, 1637. Oil on canvas, 182×232 cm. Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Naples.
© Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte / Photo L. Romano

The exhibition

The Petit Palais pays tribute to the great Spanish painter Jusepe de Ribera (1591-1652). Born in Jativà, close to Valencia, Ribera left Spain at an early age, and never returned. Circa 1605-1606, at the tender age of fifteen, he moved to Rome, where he discovered the work of Caravaggio. This encounter would have a lasting effect on him. A follower and pioneer of Caravaggio's style of painting, he actively contributed to the artistic renewal of the former. In 1616, Ribera moved to Naples, then a Spanish territory, where he would settle permanently. He rapidly rose to fame and was sought after by the viceroys who governed the city, the local aristocracy, and the religious orders. Ribera was entrusted with an increasing number of prestigious commissions, for both Neapolitan and Spanish patrons.

In the eyes of his contemporaries, Ribera was "even darker and more violent" than Caravaggio! For the Spanish artist, every painting, whether it represented a beggar, philosopher, or saint, should be a highly realistic depiction, rendered in his distinctive pictorial style. The gestures are theatrical, the colours dark or flamboyant, the realism raw, and the chiaroscuro effects dramatic. With the same acuity, he captured the dignity of everyday life as well as the violence of torture scenes. This extreme "tenebrism"—with the dark subject matter, dense shadows, and fierce realism—earned him tremendous notoriety on French soil in the 19th century, admired by figures like Baudelaire and Manet.

Featuring over one hundred paintings, drawings, and engravings from all around the world, this exhibition, a first for France, retraces the entirety of Ribera's career: the intense years spent in Rome, which have only recently been documented, and his dazzling Neapolitan period. Viewed as an ensemble, it is clear that Ribera is indeed the remarkable heir to Caravaggio: indisputably the most precocious, audacious, and extreme of the painters of the Caravaggio pictorial revolution, he is also one of the great masters of the Baroque age.

« SHARP EYES » COURSE

Ribera's work is full of intriguing details that tell us not only about the subject of his paintings, but also about the artist's personality and practice. To learn more and hone your observation skills, look for the "Sharp Eye" symbol along the way.



Jusepe de Ribera, *A beggar*, 1612-1614.
Oil on canvas, 110×78 cm. Galleria Borghese, Rome.
© Galleria Borghese, Rome.

RIBERA IN ROME. FINDING INSPIRATION IN CARAVAGGIO



Jusepe de Ribera, *Allegory of Smell*, 1615-1616. Oil on canvas, 114,5x88,3 cm. Collection Abello, Madrid. © Abello Collection, Madrid / Photo Joaquín Cortes.

There is little information about Ribera's early life in Spain. Circa 1605-1606, he moved to Rome—then the European capital of the art world—and remained there for about ten years. Living in the heart of the artists' quarter, not far from the Pantheon, the young Ribera, nicknamed "Lo Spagnoletto" (the little Spaniard), led a bohemian, extravagant, and debauched lifestyle.

Several major artistic movements dominated the Roman scene at that time. Ribera immediately opted for the revolutionary path blazed by Caravaggio (1571-1610). The latter had overturned the established canons, rejecting the sole principle of "ideal beauty", and advocating for a form of painting from real life. The two men may have met in Rome, before Caravaggio fled to Naples in May 1606.

A Caravaggisti from the outset, Ribera revisited the foundations laid out by the master but exacerbated them. His works were thus marked by a striking realism, a provocative use of live models, dramatic chiaroscuro effects, and mid-length framing, often privileging frontal poses. With an indisputable hardness, he reinterpreted new Caravaggesque-style themes, inspired by the underworld and the lower classes of society. For example, Ribera would honour a simple *Beggar* with a portrait. In the same transgressive vein, dominated by a powerful naturalism, he offered a new representation of the *Five senses* and the iconography of illustrious men.

ESTABLISHING A REPUTATION



Jusepe de Ribera, *Saint Thomas*, circa 1612. Oil on canvas, 126x97 cm. Fondation Roberto Longhi, Florence. © Per gentile concessione della Fondazione di Studi di Storia dell'Arte Roberto Longhi di Firenze / Photo Claudio Giusti.

The young Ribera initially worked by day, producing pieces for the art market, like any novice arriving in Rome at the dawn of the 17th century. He gained the admiration of his peers for his rapid speed of execution. In the space of two days, he could paint a saint, and in five, a large composition. In addition to his technical skill, he combined a predilection for series and became known in particular for his *Apostolados*. These cycles, then very fashionable in Spain, depict Christ and the twelve apostles, each on their own. The two *Apostolados* executed by Ribera in Rome, a few years apart, allow us to measure the extent of the artist's remarkable development. Painted "from real life", these are true "portraits" of saints, embodied by the painter's favourite models, chosen from his everyday surroundings. The second series, with magnetic figures, is at once more abstract, more dramatic, and more individualized. It foreshadows the Ribera to come and provides us with an insight into the keys to his success. Skilfully executed, this second series was the fruit of a major commission from Pedro Cosida, a fellow Spaniard, and agent to the King of Spain in Rome.

With the support of the Spanish community, "Lo Spagnoletto" quickly gained access to the circle of the city's biggest art collectors, such as the Marquis Vincenzo Giustiniani, Cardinal Scipione Borghese, and Duke Mario Farnese, whom he accompanied to Parma in 1611. In the space of about ten years, Ribera made a name for himself in the most important artistic capital of that time.

RIBERA UNMASKED

Our knowledge of the young Ribera, prior to his move to Naples, was for a long time limited to a few rare biographical mentions and a small number of works. The "Roman Ribera" was rediscovered in 2002: paintings hitherto attributed to the "Master of the Judgement of Solomon", in reference to the eponymous canvas (seen here), were identified as works by Ribera. The aforementioned Master, who was one of the most intriguing Caravaggisti on the Roman scene, was not in fact a French artist as he was long believed to be, but rather the young Spanish prodigy. Ribera's corpus was therefore enlarged by some sixty works, which testify to a radical change of scale, whether in terms of format, ambition, and destination.

Following in Caravaggio's footsteps, Ribera renewed the presentation of religious painting. He interpreted by painting from "real life" with a rare intensity combined with a profound humanity. In this respect, *The Denial of Saint Peter* takes the form of a contemporary drama that unfolds in a tavern before the spectator who is drawn into the scene. Ribera invented a prototype that would enjoy tremendous success. These monumental compositions, in the form of friezes, at the forefront of Caravaggism, were primarily destined for the most beautiful Roman palaces, including that of the Cardinal Scipione Borghese, the privileged owner of the famous *Judgement of Solomon*.



Jusepe de Ribera, *The Judgement of Solomon*, circa 1609-1610. Oil on canvas, 153×201 cm. Galleria Borghese, Rome.
© Galleria Borghese, Rome.

RIBERA AND NAPLES. THE RISE TO GLORY (1616-1652)



Jusepe de Ribera, *The Crowning with Thorns*, 1616-1618. Oil on canvas, 197×115 cm. Casa de Alba - Palacio de las Duenas, Séville.
© Fundación Casa de Alba, Séville.

Ribera settled in Naples in 1616, where he married the daughter of painter Bernardino Azzolino, who was already well established in the city. This alliance opened the doors to a clientele of local aristocrats and the numerous religious orders present in the city. He once again came face to face with the impressive inventions of Caravaggio, who had died a few years previously. The master of chiaroscuro's Neapolitan works inspired Ribera's own. From this point onward, Ribera established himself as the new leader of Neapolitan naturalism.

At the beginning of the 17th century, Naples was a true cosmopolitan city, one of the three most important capitals in Europe, and home to a unique artistic effervescence. It was also a Spanish protectorate, governed by viceroys who followed each other to power in rapid succession. Quickly appreciated by these civil servants of the monarchy, Ribera was assured official protection and acquired the status of court painter. His influence outside Italy, and particularly in Spain, was astounding. Large commissions abounded: a series of saints for the collegiate church of Osuna, portraits of philosophers or ordinary people, large-scale mythological scenes, the masterpiece for the altar of the San Gennaro Chapel, the prestigious decoration of the Certosa di San Martino. Ribera also produced skilful drawings and engravings. His harsh style from his early days in Rome evolved towards a greater lyricism and use of colour. The artist explored multiple registers and relentlessly reworked his obsessions.

HUMBLE SPLENDOUR

Ribera was the brilliant inventor of a new typology: he represented the greatest thinkers as paupers dressed in rags who imposed themselves on the viewer, at once provocative and majestic. His message was a radical one but echoed the intellectual and spiritual context of the time that saw a correlation between inner wealth and outer poverty. The series of half-length portraits of philosophers, painted from live models, allowed him to explore a wide variety of expressions. The artist focused more on the psychological truth of the individual rather than on the precise identification of the character. With a certain derision, these figures, between the noble and the prosaic, demonstrate the dignity of poverty. They captivate through their silent presence. If these philosophers question us on key existential subjects, in return, they encourage introspection. This is the case with the series of philosopher-beggars commissioned by the Duke of Alcalá from Ribera in the 1630s, which revisits, in a profane register, the cycles of saints in his *Apostolados* from his Roman period. The remarkably lifelike subjects emerge powerfully from the shadows, surrounded by skilful representations of still-life elements. The extraordinary "family portrait" that Ribera painted of the "bearded lady" and her husband, again for the Duke of Alcalá, is truly a masterpiece of humanity.



Jusepe de Ribera, *Maddalena Ventura and her husband, alias « The bearded lady »*, 1631. Oil on canvas, 196×127 cm. Hopital Tavera - Fondation Medinacelli, Tolède.
En dépôt au Musée du Prado, Madrid.
© Photographic Archive, Museo Nacional del Prado. Madrid

FACE TO FACE WITH RIBERA (PROJECTION)

This film invites visitors to enter Ribera's work. By first showing Caravaggio's production, the visual sources and references from which Ribera drew become apparent. Visitors can then discover the way in which Ribera created and varied certain motifs, exploiting and reworking them in a ceaseless aesthetic quest. Finally, viewers can delve into the artist's work itself, through the minute details that testify to his extraordinary technical virtuosity. This immersive experience shines a light on Ribera's immense talent.

A TRIBUTE TO THE EVERYDAY

Throughout his career, whether in Rome or Naples, Ribera took an interest in marginalized figures. In Naples, although he had been appointed the official painter of the Spanish viceroys and was entrusted with a growing number of important religious commissions, Ribera also remained the great portraitist of the ordinary Neapolitan people. With his figures of gypsies, chaperones, and street boys (the famous scugnizzi), he immerses us in a colourful repertoire, close to the picaresque universe of Spanish literature, as well as to the popular forms of theatre and song of the time. Whether he lends the realistic features of figures from the Neapolitan lower classes to allegories (*Girl with a Tambourine*, *The Old Usurer*) or creates a portrait of an unfortunate cripple and transforms him into a valiant swordsman (*The Club-footed Boy*), he excels in creating a sense of wonder from the misery of everyday life.



Jusepe de Ribera, *The Club-footed Boy*, 1642.
Oil on canvas, 164×94. Musée du Louvre, Paris.
© Grand Palais RMN (musée du Louvre) / Photo Michel Urtado.

A WHIMSICAL ILLUSTRATOR



Jusepe de Ribera, *Head of a Satyr*
1620-1625. Sanguine sur papier
vergé, 30,3×21,1 cm.
The Metropolitan museum of Art,
New York. © The Metropolitan
museum of Art.

Ribera was a talented illustrator and engraver. His dynamic line bears witness to his fascination with physical expression and his ceaseless search for movement. Drawing and engraving were not very common activities amongst the other Carravaggisti and illustrates Ribera's continued quest for renewal and novelty. At ease with all kinds of techniques, he was proficient in red chalk, pen and ink, and worked in a wide variety of styles. He executed rapid simplified sketches, laying out the broad outlines of a project, as well as highly accomplished ones for compositions with a strong pictorial dimension. The originality of Ribera's drawings lies in the fact that they are not generally thought of as preparatory to his paintings. For the most part, drawing was for him an experimental laboratory where he gave free rein to his imagination and explored some of his personal obsessions. This rare, still little-known corpus demonstrates a pronounced taste for burlesque, caricature, and fantasy, as well as a darker, more distressing vein, evocative of Goya.

A SKILLED ENGRAVER

Ribera produced a limited number of engravings over a brief period. Nevertheless, these are remarkable in terms of their quality. The corpus attributed to him consists of eighteen etchings and spans some ten years of creation, from his move to Naples in 1616 and up until 1630. Only one work dates from a later period: the Equestrian Portrait of *Don Juan of Austria* (1648). After an interval of almost twenty years, Ribera placed himself at the service of the authorities by commemorating the triumphant arrival in Naples of the illegitimate son of Philip IV who had come to quell the Masaniello Revolt, which for a few days, in July 1647, had succeeded in overthrowing the Spanish powers. Although he devoted little time to this medium compared to his pictorial work, engraving remained a remarkable tool that allowed him to extend his influence and affirm his reputation in Europe and over time.

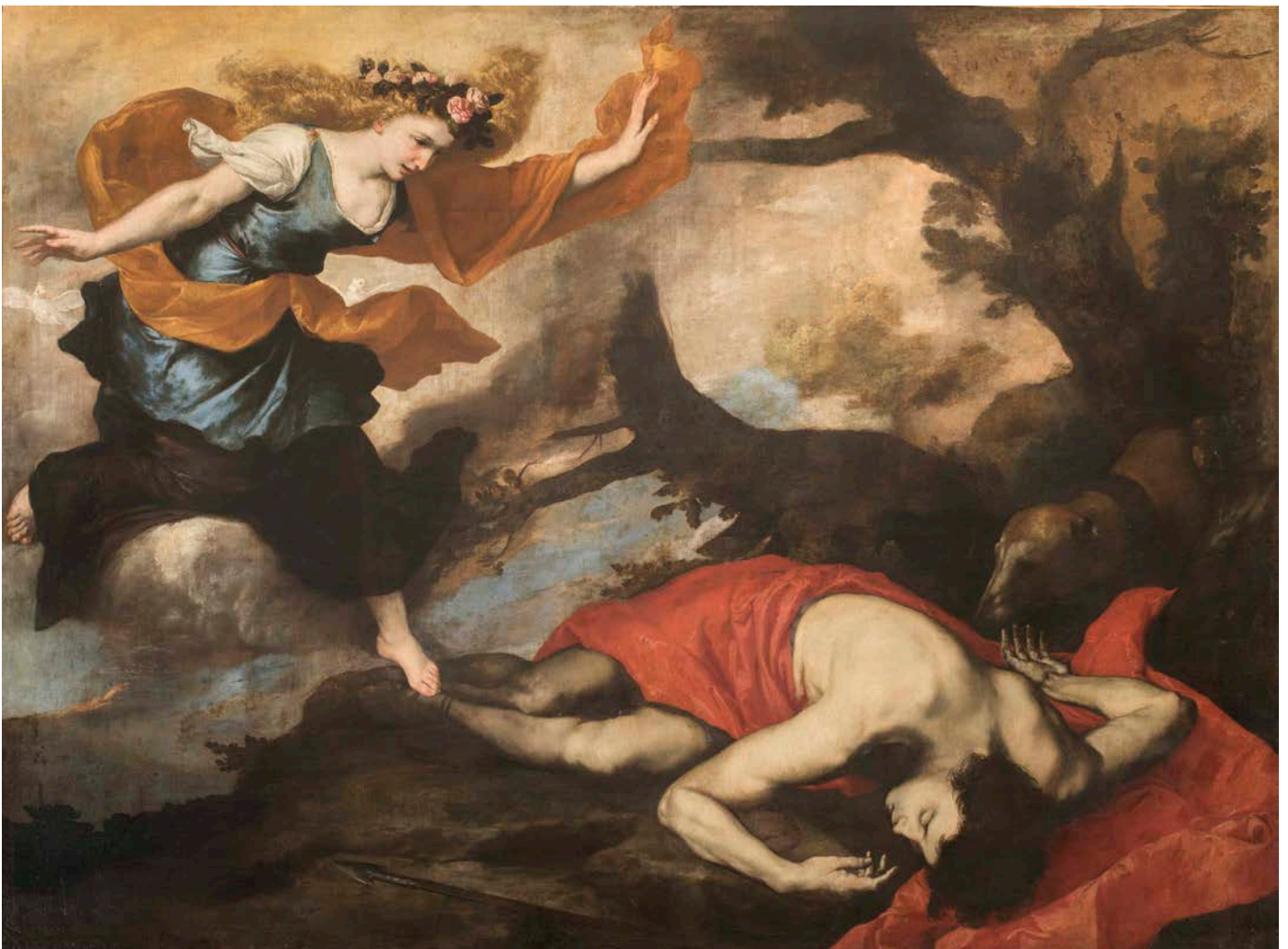
Ribera produced etchings, a soft-engraving process where the copper plate is covered with a varnish and then dipped in an acid bath, which cuts into the drawing incised onto the plate using a sharp needle. Gradually, Ribera mastered this technique, especially the chiaroscuro effects, generated by the intensity of the hatching. One of the best examples of his engraved productions is *The Drunken Silenus*, with its wide spectrum of textural effects, allowing the painted composition to evolve, proof that Ribera never ceased to rework his output.



Jusepe de Ribera, *Drunken Silenus*, 1628. Etching and burin,
47×72,5 cm. Petit Palais, musée des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Paris.
© Paris Musées / Petit Palais.

REINVENTING THE ANTIQUE FABLE

The 1630s were a dense period for Ribera, during which he received numerous accolades: in 1626, he was decorated with the Cross of the Order of Christ in Rome. The Spaniard enjoyed a prominent position in the Neapolitan arts scene. He created some of his finest masterpieces—ambitious and spectacular compositions, inspired by ancient fables—but reinvented these erudite references with a certain irreverence and lyricism. His taste for provocation, the grotesque, derision, but also human drama, is evident. For example, could we say that *The Drunken Silenus* offers a particularly iconoclastic variation of the *Reclining Venus*? Have we ever seen such a sadistic and beautiful Apollo? The artist, at the pinnacle of his career, was uninhibited, audacious, and daring. A true theatre of passions, his painting displays a remarkable sensory dimension, at once visual and tactile, even aural. Everything is mastered in the treatment and effects of texture: the body, suffering or sated, the folds of flesh, the hair, the fabrics... A new grace and chromatic range enriched with electric blues, scarlet reds, and crimson purples reveal his Venetian and Flemish sources of inspiration. His spectacular *Venus and Adonis* plunges the viewer into a peaceful atmosphere imbued with a gentle poetry, despite the drama evoked.



Jusepe de Ribera, *Venus and Adonis*, 1637. Oil on canvas, 179×262 cm. Galerie Corsini, Gallerie Nazionali di Arte Antica, Rome.
© Gallerie Nazionali di Arte Antica, Barberini/Corsini, Ministero della Cultura.

FROM NAPLES TO SPAIN

After bringing the representation of the isolated figure to its peak and reinventing the myth with impertinence, Ribera tackled new subjects, for which he adopted an original approach. His astonishing *Women in Combat* explored a unique theme from a singular monumental perspective.

Beyond his skill in treating the landscape as a background, the painter delivered in his two autonomous landscape paintings a meditation on nature, where the vibrations of silvery light endow the idealized countryside with a bucolic softness.

These ensembles, atypical in the artist's production, also testify to the large quantity of his works sent to Spain. Whether commissions intended for the viceroys' hometowns (Osuna, Salamanca) or for the decoration of the Madrid palaces of King Philip IV (Alcázar or Buen Retiro), Ribera created works for Spain without ever returning to his native country.



Jusepe de Ribera, *Landscape with Shepherds*, 1639. Oil on canvas, 128×269 cm. Casa de Alba - Palacio de las Duenas, Séville.
© Fundación Casa de Alba, Séville.

THE PERSUASIVE POWER OF TRUTH AND EMOTION



Jusepe de Ribera, *Saint Jerome*, 1634.
Oil on canvas, 126×78 cm.
Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza Madrid.
© Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid

In the first half of the 17th century, the recommendations of the Catholic Church, established at the Council of Trent (1545-1563), were applied to the arts. In opposition to the Protestant Reformation, the Catholic Counter-Reformation reaffirmed the place of images in the Catholic religion and their ability to arouse the devotion of the faithful through emotion. Within this context and against the backdrop of Spanish faith and Neapolitan piety, Ribera sought to convince through truth and emotion. He took up the challenge of painting the expression of passions “au naturel” and endeavoured to translate pain, psychological introspection, and the beauty of Christ’s dead body. He emphasized the truth or reality of individuals, presented as close as possible to the viewer, as well as the sincerity of expressions. Finally, he played on the evocative power of colour, particularly those that contrast with the shadows and darkness.

The depiction of hermits and penitents was an important part of his work. His variations on Saint Jerome, painted over forty times throughout his career, underline the saint’s sincere devotion rather than his scholarly dignity. *Saint Mary of Egypt* stands out for the radicality of her ascetic minimalism. Ribera conveys religious ecstasy, as well as the celestial vision or the divine miracle, but always from a realistic perspective. His works of devotion effectively challenge the faithful: they move, arouse empathy, and allow the viewer to identify with these modest saintly, but very human figures, shown at close range.

DEPICTING PATHOS

The Lamentation over Christ was the theme of several of Ribera’s paintings, from an early production in Rome to one of his last works done in the 1650s. The painter explored and developed the traditional trope of the *Pietà*, or the *Madonna of Sorrows*, a motif wherein the mother of Christ, weeping, alone or surrounded, holds her dead son on her lap. Ribera portrayed the intense sorrow around the death of Christ in a number of variations, each endowed with a strong emotional charge capable of inspiring devotion. The theme was particularly appreciated in Counter-Reformation art, which exploited the Passion of the Christ and other models capable of arousing empathy.

For the first time, three versions of the subject by Ribera coming from the National Gallery in London, the Louvre, and the Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum in Madrid are displayed together. The presence of the three paintings here allows us to understand how the artist developed and renewed his motifs.



Jusepe de Ribera, *The Lamentation over the Dead Christ*, 1618-1623. Oil on canvas, 129,5×181 cm. The National Gallery, London.
© The National Gallery, London.

THE SPECTACLE OF VIOLENCE

The representation of violence is at the heart of Ribera's production. His compositions of Christian martyrs punctuate his entire Neapolitan career. The bold framing, asymmetrical constructions, large diagonals, and the movements of the crowd all eloquently question the viewer, as if inviting them to participate in the suffering represented. These torture scenes were based on real-life killings, orchestrated in public squares by the Inquisition, and witnessed by Ribera. At the heart of these spectacular paintings, the representation of the flesh dominates: an aged, exposed, bloody, torn flesh, where all the skill of Ribera's brush is expressed.

The Martyrdom of Saint Bartholomew gave Ribera a terrifying motif of a suffering, dislocated, and bruised body. The artist produced multiple versions of the subject, from the first commission for the Duke of Osuna in 1616, to the last version of 1644. It reveals a form of fascination for the mixture of sensations, vacillating between attraction and repulsion, conjured forth by this flaying scene. The spectacle of the torture and the pictorial feat merge into a masterful intensity of terror.

The artist also painted Saint Andrew and Saint Sebastian, both of whom suffered physical torture, but he lessens the horrific aspects of their martyrdom. One of his last paintings of *Saint Sebastian* for the Certosa di San Martino in 1651, even tends towards an eroticized appeasement of the subject. It was for such radical extremes that Ribera was known by 19th-century French artists and writers. For example, Théophile Gautier said of him: "With what voluptuous fury you reverse the skin of the martyr being flayed, to show us the bloody underneath!"



Jusepe de Ribera, *The Martyrdom of Saint Bartholomew*, 1644. Oil on canvas, 202×153 cm. Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya. © Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona

Scenography

The exhibition scenography, designed by Cécile Degos, has been done in such a way as to maximize the visual and emotional impact of Ribera's works. The exhibition route allows for dynamic perspectives throughout the gallery spaces, generating connections and contrasts between the works. This airy approach, alternating between full and empty spaces, promotes a fluid and rhythmic journey. The objective is to create a dialogue between Ribera's brutal yet poetic images, allowing visitors to discover or rediscover his moving painting that transcribes everyday life and human drama with palpable intensity. Composed of seven sequences, Cécile Degos' scenography intentionally articulates the works and encourages comparisons between them. Each piece is strategically positioned to best reveal the scenes and emotions they depict, encouraging meditation and reverie throughout.

The exhibition balances visual noise and silence, while highlighting the variety of subjects and formats of Ribera's work. This diversity creates a sense of dynamism that mirrors the scientific and artistic purpose of the exhibition. The gallery walls are painted in delicate shades, reflecting the evolution of Ribera's life and the relationships between the living and the non-living, materialism and spirituality, abundance and scarcity. The section focusing on Rome uses earthy tones, a palette of browns ranging from a light to a burnt umber, evoking the black pigment of Rome used in various colouring techniques. The Naples section, on the other hand, features a gradient of blues, highlighting religious and celestial themes.

The door frames are painted a warm grey, echoing the Neapolitan palette, while the graphics on the panels resonate with the theme of each section, creating a chromatic unity that accentuates the guiding thread of each sequence. Through these chromatic and graphic choices, the exhibition does not just present works of art, it also tells a story. The colours chosen are not arbitrary; they are carefully selected to evoke specific emotions and to accentuate the overall narrative. Each shade, each tone, participates in this story, offering visitors an immersive experience where colour becomes a language in itself, recounting the evolution and nuances of the Baroque theme.

The scenographer, in line with her commitment to sustainability, has designed this exhibition in a way that a majority of scenographic elements can be reused, thus reducing unnecessary waste. The structures deployed throughout the exhibition are modular and reusable, thereby minimizing the environmental impact while maintaining a high aesthetic quality.



Press visuals



1. Jusepe de Ribera, *A beggar*, 1612-1614.
Oil on canvas, 110×78 cm. Galleria Borghese, Rome.
© Galleria Borghese, Rome.

With his direct gaze, his red-coloured hands holding out a beret to us as he asks for alms, this beggar in rags embodies the humble characters that Ribera so skilfully highlighted in his paintings. The frontal treatment of the half-length figure, as close as possible to the viewer, the broad brushstrokes, and strong luminous accents are all characteristic of the artist's early Roman productions. The painting, present in the Borghese Collections since the start of the 17th century, is revolutionary in the sense that never before had such sincere attention been paid to an ordinary figure. This marginal individual, one perhaps encountered in the streets of Rome, profoundly strikes the viewer by the hardship of his circumstances.



2. Jusepe de Ribera, *Allegory of Smell*, 1615-1616. Oil on canvas, 114,5×88,3 cm.
Collection Abello, Madrid.
© Abello Collection, Madrid / Photo Joaquín Cortes.

The *Five Senses* series is believed to have been commissioned by Pedro Cosida, the King of Spain's commercial representative in Rome. In a highly original fashion, Ribera treats the allegory as a genre scene taken from everyday life in a naturalistic vein. The Sense of Smell is personified by a beggar wearing a shapeless hat, with a sunken face and a full beard, dressed in rags. Ribera suggests the powerful smell coming from the cut onion by the tear springing from the corner of the model's eye. Another whole onion, a bulb of garlic, and a sprig of orange blossom are casually arranged on the table in the foreground.



3. Jusepe de Ribera, *Saint Bartholomew*, 1612.
Oil on canvas, 126×97 cm.
Fondation Roberto Longhi, Florence. © Per gentile concessione della Fondazione di Studi di Storia dell'Arte Roberto Longhi di Firenze / Photo Claudio Giusti.

This is Ribera's second known *Apostolado*, known as the "Cosida" *Apostolado*, in honour of its patron, Pedro Cosida, an agent of the King of Spain in Rome, and an art collector. The figures, depicted from mid-thigh upwards, are slightly enlarged in size compared to those of the first *Apostolado*, and stand out against a plain background, crossed by a violent, diagonal ray of light, also found in Caravaggio's production. The heads, with their distinctive and individualized features, are surrounded by a golden halo. The heavy cloaks with ample folds bring the figures to life and envelop their sculptural presence. Ribera stages this work in a theatrical fashion around these effigies of unprecedented monumentality.

[Sharpe eyes](#) : Do you recognize this bald character with a round wrinkled face? Here, Ribera gives one of his favourite models the role of the apostle Bartholomew, condemned to be skinned alive. The saint is identifiable by his attributes: the knife, the instrument of his torture in his right hand, and his flayed skin in his left. When we look closely at this however, we notice that the hirsute face does not resemble that of the bald man. Perhaps the artist intends to signify something important with this strange detail.



4. Jusepe de Ribera, *Saint Thomas*, 1612.

Oil on canvas, 126×97 cm. Fondazione Roberto Longhi, Florence.

© Per gentile concessione della Fondazione di Studi di Storia dell'Arte Roberto Longhi di Firenze /

Photo Claudio Giusti.



5. Jusepe de Ribera, *The Judgement of Solomon*, 1609-1610.

Oil on canvas, 153×201 cm. Galleria Borghese, Rome.

© Galleria Borghese, Rome.

The scene is taken from an episode of the Old Testament where King Solomon is taken to task by two women, each claiming to be the mother of a newborn. After offering to cut the child in two to satisfy both women, the king recognizes the true mother as the one who would prefer to give up her own child rather than have it cut in two. The staging is particularly theatrical: the decor is closed on the left by a pillar, on the right by a figure in profile. The light, violently illuminating the scene from the left, highlights the characters' gestures.

Sharp eyes : Here we can see the bald man, hidden in the shadows, facing forward, in a position identical to the one he has in the painting of him as Saint Bartholomew (shown in the previous room). The figure in side profile to the right corresponds perfectly to the Saint Thomas from the same series. Ribera clearly reused certain motifs from one composition to the next in a copy-paste technique that is clearly evident here.



6. Jusepe de Ribera, *Saint Peter Released from Prison*, 1612-1614.

Oil on canvas, 193×143 cm. Galleria Borghese, Rome.

© Galleria Borghese, Rome.

The episode of Saint Peter imprisoned in Jerusalem and freed by an angel untying his bonds was a subject that enjoyed some success in painting in the early 17th century. In this version, whose vertical format suggests an altar painting for a church, Ribera cites and reinvents certain elements from some of Caravaggio's famous large commissions, such as *Saint Matthew and the Angel* (1599-1602, Contarelli Chapel, Church of San Luigi dei Francesi in Rome). We can see notably the motif of the adolescent angel, who wrapped in a spiralling cloak, throws himself towards the lower end of the composition.



7. Jusepe de Ribera, *The Denial of Saint Peter*, 1615-1616.

Oil on canvas, 163×233 cm. Galerie Corsini, Rome.

© Gallerie Nazionali di Arte Antica, Ministero della Cultura.

After the Crucifixion, Saint Peter, identified as one of Jesus' disciples, publicly denies his allegiance. In this painting, Ribera makes use of the emblematic elements of the composition of Caravaggio's *The Calling of Saint Matthew*. The central figure in the foreground with his back to the viewer, creates an effect of spatial depth, and the two figures pointing in Ribera's canvas are gestures of denunciation, focusing on Saint Peter. The religious scene was based on a very prosaic everyday scene, evoking the Roman underworld.



8. Jusepe de Ribera, *Saint Andrew*, 1615-1618.

Oil on canvas, 132×107,5 cm. Quadreria dei Girolamini, Naples.

© Photo Scala, Florence

As with his other figures of saints or philosophers, this half-length Saint Andrew in prayer could have come from an *Apostolado*. The martyrdom of Saint Andrew, crucified on the cross, was the focus of particular devotion in the south of Italy. Ribera was no doubt aware of *The Crucifixion of Saint Andrew* commissioned from Caravaggio in Naples in 1607 (Cleveland Museum of Art). Here, Ribera reaches an additional level in the chromatic subtlety of the ochre tones, the chiaroscuro that shapes the volumes, and the anatomical rendering of the figure.



9. Jusepe de Ribera, *Saint Jerome and the Angel of Judgement*, 1626.

Oil on canvas, 262×164 cm.

Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Naples.

Su concessione del MiC – Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte © Archivio dell'arte/Luciano et Marco Pedicini.

Executed for the high altar of the Church of the Trinità delle Monache, this painting represents the culmination of Ribera's maturity in Naples. While he is busy writing, Saint Jerome is surprised by an angel playing a trumpet. This theme, because it exalts the human nature of a saint, in direct connection with the divine, was particularly popular during the Counter-Reformation. The composition generates a dialogue between the body of the hermit and that of the angel, one stretching towards the sky, the other plunging towards earth. Tangible objects respond to palpable flesh: the realistic depiction of the remarkable still life with the skull and books contrasts starkly with the emaciated saint's flaccid skin.



10. Jusepe de Ribera, *The Crowning with Thorns*, 1616-1618.

Oil on canvas, 197×115 cm. Casa de Alba - Palacio de las Duenas, Séville.

© Fundación Casa de Alba, Séville.

Ribera offers a vertical version of the subject, where the magnificent, muscular body of Christ, curled up, cowering under the blows of his tormentors, is depicted in all its vulnerability. The realism of the flesh and expressions, the light with strong contrasts, and the artificial use of the red cape all accentuate the theatrical nature of the scene. Christ's severe gaze challenges the spectator and invites the faithful to meditate on the reasons for his suffering.

11. Jusepe de Ribera, *Magdalena Ventura and her Husband* ["*The Bearded Lady*"], 1631.

Oil on canvas, 196×127 cm.

Hopital Tavera - Fondation Medinacelli, Tolède.

En dépôt au Musée du Prado, Madrid.

© Photographic Archive, Museo Nacional del Prado. Madrid



What a strange picture this is! Here, we see a bearded woman breastfeeding a baby, standing before us, accompanied by her husband, who is positioned behind her.

In 1631, Ribera was called to the royal palace by the Duke of Alcalá to paint a "natural wonder". This event is explicitly transcribed in the inscription on the stone blocks to the right. The artist painted "from a live model" (AD / VIVVM MIRE DEPINXIT) the portrait of a certain Magdalena Ventura, a fifty-two-year-old woman from Abruzzo who, after giving birth to three children, at the age of thirty-seven, grew a thick beard, more than likely a result of a hormonal imbalance.

The painter was keen to depict this natural wonder (EN MAGNV[M] NATVRA MIRACVLVM), as stated in the inscription, which must have been a phenomenon worthy of being recorded by the most famous painter in Naples at the time. Ribera dates the work—16 February 1631—and signs it, comparing himself to Apelles, the most illustrious painter of antiquity.

Here, Ribera offers us a resolutely unconventional family portrait, a radical break with the style of court portraiture of the day. The viewer cannot help but be struck by this frontal image that emphasizes the contrast between the long black beard and the white breast swollen with milk upon which the child feeds. Nevertheless, the great humanity, even the nobility of the figures prevails over the sense of strangeness or incongruity.



12. Jusepe de Ribera, *The Club-Footed Boy*, 1642.
Oil on canvas, 164×94 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris.
© Grand Palais RMN (musée du Louvre) /
Photo Michel Urtado.

This painting depicts a young disabled boy, without shoes and poorly dressed, begging alms. Ribera endows the subject with a novel dimension and a rare nobility by isolating the figure on a canvas with a format traditionally associated with ceremonial portraits. This boy with a joyful expression is rendered in detail, down to the reality of his condition and the particularities of his disability. The inscription on the sheet sheds light on the boy's intention: "DA MIHI ELIMO/SINAM PROPTER [AM]OREM DEI" (Give me alms for the love of God). Therefore, the work invites the viewer to display charity, one of the three main Christian virtues, which should be placed in the religious context of the time, that of the Counter-Reformation. The luminous sky corresponds to an evolution in Ribera's painting style between 1638 and 1642, a period during which he turned away from his usual dark backgrounds.



13. Jusepe de Ribera, *Head of a Satyr* 1620-1625.
Sanguine drawing on laid paper, 30,3×21,1 cm.
The Metropolitan museum of Art, New York. Ø The
Metropolitan museum of Art.



14. Jusepe de Ribera, *Man Wearing a Large Cloak and a Small Naked Man on His Head* 1637-1640.
Ink and gouache, 21.2×10 cm.
The Metropolitan museum of Art, New York.
Ø The Metropolitan museum of Art.



15. Jusepe de Ribera, *Drunken Silenus*, 1628.
Etching and burin, 27,5×35,4 cm.
Petit Palais, musée des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Paris.
Ø Paris Musées / Petit Palais.



16. Jusepe de Ribera, *The Martyrdom of Saint Bartholomew*, 1624.
Etching and burin, 31,3×23,7 cm.
Petit Palais, musée des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Paris.
Ø Paris Musées / Petit Palais



17. Jusepe de Ribera, *Don Juan of Austria*, 1648.
Etching and burin, 35×25,7 cm.
Petit Palais, musée des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Paris.
Ø Paris Musées / Petit Palais.

18. Jusepe de Ribera, *The Lamentation over the Dead Christ*, 1618-1623.

Oil on canvas, 129,5×181 cm. The National Gallery, London.
© The National Gallery, London.



Here, the lamentation theme presents a moment of contemplation around the body of Christ, just taken down from the cross. The three people closest to Jesus are depicted in tears: his mother, the Virgin Mary in the centre in her blue cloak; Mary Magdalene, with her bright-coloured hair, and Saint John, the beloved disciple, on the right. Accentuated by the glowing white sheet, the livid corpse, already grey-blue in places, illuminates the composition against the dark background. The work, which dates from the early years of Ribera's stay in Naples is believed to be his first representation on this theme.

Sharp eyes : Look carefully at the centre of the folds on the sheet flush with Christ's shoulder, just to the left of the signature. A severe eye seems to be staring at us! Has the devil's eye inserted itself into the folds of the fabric? Or is it the artist's eye, a mischievous addition to his signature?



19. Jusepe de Ribera, *Saint Jerome*, 1634. Oil on canvas, 126×78 cm. Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza Madrid.
© Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid.



20. Jusepe de Ribera, *Drunken Silenus*, 1626.

Oil on canvas, 185×229 cm.

Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Naples.

© Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte / Photo L. Romano

This painting is exceptional in Ribera's oeuvre because of its mythological subject matter. At the centre of the composition, a pot-bellied satyr, Silenus is seen lying lasciviously on the ground, fully naked, being served a glass of wine. In accordance with tradition, he is associated with a donkey, which he has made his mount, and with the processions of fauns and satyrs that usually accompany Bacchus, the god of wine, of whom he is the adoptive father. In the assembly behind him, we can make out the god Pan with his horns and goat's legs, who crowns him with vines. At first glance, the scene appears to be a burlesque parody, but a meditative face in the top right corner underlines Silenus's paradoxical nature: known for abusing alcohol, he was also reputed to hold the secrets of wisdom.



21. Jusepe de Ribera, *Apollo and Marsyas*, 1637.
Oil on canvas, 182×232 cm.

Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Naples.

© Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte / Photo L. Romano

The satyr Marsyas, who had the audacity to challenge Apollo, the god of music, during a musical competition, was harshly punished by the latter, who flayed him alive. Hanging from a tree, head down, the tortured man calls out to us, screaming in pain. The extreme suffering expressed on Marsyas's deformed face contrasts with the serenity of Apollo, who impassively observes his victim. The terrifying gesture of the executioner plunging his hand into the gaping wound contrasts with the beauty of the iridescent mauve drapery that seems to float around him. In the background, the horrified satyrs watch as their companion is tortured.



22. Jusepe de Ribera, *Venus and Adonis*, 1637.

Oil on canvas, 179×262 cm.

Gallerie Corsini, Gallerie Nazionali di Arte Antica, Rome.

© Gallerie Nazionali di Arte Antica, Barberini/Corsini, Ministero della Cultura.

Adonis, a handsome young man loved by Venus, was wounded by a wild boar while hunting. The goddess, alerted by her dying lover's moans, flies (literally) to his aid. The latter lies peacefully, as if asleep, on a beautiful fabric of scarlet red, symbolizing his blood that will be transformed into an anemone. The effects of the folds of the electric-coloured fabric and the thundery sky in the background are characteristic of Ribera's increasing use of colour in the 1640s.



23. Jusepe de Ribera, *Landscape with Shepherds*, 1639.

Oil on canvas, 128×269 cm. Casa de Alba - Palacio de las Duenas, Séville. © Fundación Casa de Alba, Séville.



24. Jusepe de Ribera, *The Martyrdom of Saint Bartholomew*, 1644.

Oil on canvas, 202×153 cm.

Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya.

© Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona

Unlike many other martyrdom scenes, here Saint Bartholomew's gaze fixes the viewer instead of addressing heaven. The saint's face remains impassive, and his suffering contained. His eyes are bloodshot but without tears, his mouth half-open but mute. His outstretched left palm invites an empathetic contemplation of the scene. In the 19th century, the painter Jean-François Millet, while admiring this painting, had the sensation of "hearing the crackling of the skin as it was ripped from the flesh." This is Ribera's art: images so powerful that they summon the senses.

Sharp Eyes : Notice in the foreground, the marble head with the face turned against the ground, under the saint's posterior. This is the head of a famous antique sculpture, preserved in the Vatican since the 16th century: the Belvedere Apollo. Ribera not only introduces an erudite reference, but also hints that Christianity, through the sacrifice of its saints, has supplanted pagan religions. With Apollo, the greatest flayer of mythology invites himself into this Christian representation staging a flaying.



25. Jusepe de Ribera, *Saint Sebastian*, 1651.

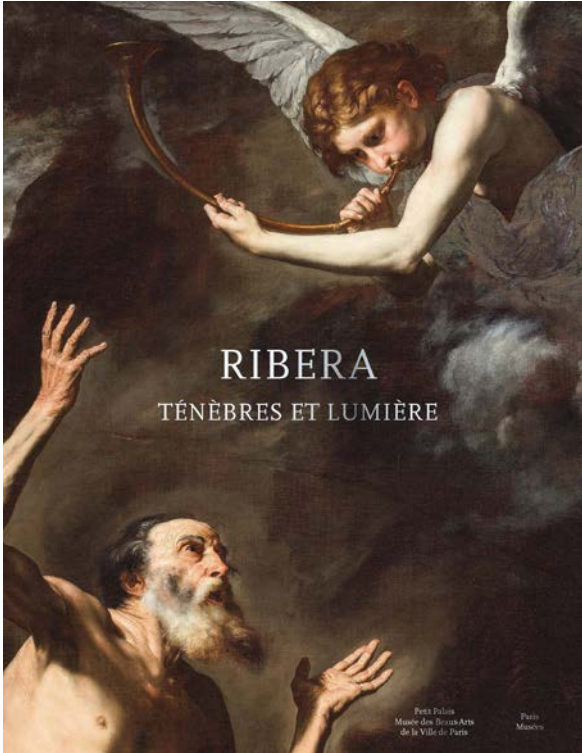
Oil on canvas, 121×100 cm.

Certosa e Museo Nazionale di San Martino.

© Certosa e Museo Nazionale di San Martino / Photo Fabio Speranza

Commissioned in 1638 for the Certosa di San Martino, this painting and a *Saint Jerome* were intended for the prior's private apartments. Ribera only completed them in 1651, a year before his death, when he had barely recovered from the illness that had weakened him considerably. Framed from the waist up, this depiction of Saint Sebastian, bare-chested, absorbed in a gentle beatitude, seems to contrast completely with the previous tormented martyrs depicted by Ribera. The sensuality of the torso, reinforced by the highly realistic chest hair, and the saint's ecstatic expression call for peaceful meditation.

Catalogue of the exhibition



Ribera, Shadows and Light

Under the direction of Annick Lemoine, Head Curator, Director of the Petit Palais and Maïté Metz, Heritage Curator at the Petit Palais.

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The Petit Palais

The City of Paris Museum of Fine Arts



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Built for the Exposition Universelle of 1900, the Petit Palais building is a masterpiece by architect Charles Girault. In 1902, it became the City of Paris Museum of Fine Arts and presents a very beautiful collection of paintings, sculptures, furnishings and art objects dating from Antiquity to 1914. Among the museum treasures are an exceptional collection of Greek vases and a very large group of Flemish and Dutch paintings from the seventeenth century, displayed around the famous Self-Portrait with Dog by Rembrandt. A magnificent collection of French paintings from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries includes major works by Fragonard, Greuze, David, Géricault, Delacroix, Courbet, Pissarro, Monet, Sisley, Cézanne and Vuillard. The museum is also very proud of a very beautiful collection of sculptures by Carpeaux, Carriès and Dalou. The collection of decorative art is especially noted for objects from the Renaissance and the 1900s, including glasswork by Gallé, jewellery by Fouquet and Lalique and a dining room designed by Guimard for his private mansion. Finally, the museum has an outstanding graphic arts room featuring complete series of engravings by Dürer, Rembrandt and Callot and a rare collection of Nordic drawings.

Since 2015, the collection presentation has been extensively reworked. It has been enriched by two new galleries on the garden floor level, one of which is dedicated to the Romantic period. In one gallery, restored large-format paintings by Delaroche and Schnetz are surrounded by works of artists such as Ingres, Géricault and Delacroix. In the second gallery, decorative paintings by Maurice Denis are interspersed with works by Cézanne, Bonnard, Maillol and Vallotton. In the fall of 2017, the collection of icons and Eastern Orthodox arts, which is the largest one in France, will benefit from a new museographic presentation. An area will also be dedicated to sketches of the major nineteenth-century Parisian settings. Early in 2018, these new presentations will be complemented in the North Gallery by collections of monumental sculptures from the nineteenth century.

The program of temporary exhibitions at the Petit Palais alternates ambitious major subjects like Paris romantic, Paris 1900, Les Bas-fonds du Baroque (Baroque Slums) and Oscar Wilde with monographs that allow rediscovering forgotten painters such as Anders Zorn, Albert Besnard or George Desvallières. Since 2015, contemporary artists (Thomas Lerooy in 2015, Kehinde Wiley in 2016, Andres Serrano in 2017, Valérie Jouve in 2018, Yan Pei-Ming in 2019, Laurence Aëgerter in 2020, Jean-Michel Othoniel in 2021, Ugo Rondinone in 2022 and Loris Gréaud in 2023) have been invited to exhibit in the Petit Palais permanent collections in order to create a dialog with these paintings and reveal links between their works and those of the museum.

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*Except the archaeological Crypt under the forecourt of l'île de la Cité and the Catacombs.

General Information

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