



Petit Palais
Musée des Beaux-Arts
de la Ville de Paris

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, 262x164 cm.
Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Naples. © Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte

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

Press Release

October 2024

CURATORS

Annick Lemoine, Head Curator,
Director of the Petit Palais

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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.

GENERAL INFORMATION

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Tuesday to Sunday from 10:00 a.m to
6:00 pm
Late opening on Friday and Saturday
until 8:00 pm

ADMISSION

Full rate : 15 €
Reduced rate : 13 €

Reservation of a recommended visit
time on petitpalais.paris.en

Accessible to people with
disabilities.

The exhibition was made possible thanks to the  GROUPE BPCE