

Italian Baroque

Carlo Cesare Malvasia publishes the <i>Felsina pittrice</i> , a history of Bolognese painters and painting	1678	Bernini creates <i>The Ecstasy of Saint Teresa</i> for the Cornaro family chapel in the Church of Santa Maria della Vittoria
The 'Grand Tour' through France and Italy is first promulgated in <i>The Voyage of Italy</i> , a guidebook by Richard Lassels	1670	
Crete, a Venetian possession since 1204, falls to the Ottoman Turks; the Greek Peloponnese follows in 1715	1669	
Antonio Stradavari begins an apprenticeship with Nicolò Amati	c.1658	
Bernini begins the construction of Piazza San Pietro and its colonnade	1656	
	1637	Teatro San Cassiano, the first public opera house, opens in Venice; the new theatrical form exemplifies the Baroque unity of poetry, music, architecture and art
In the face of prosecution by the Inquisition in Rome for his support of the Copernican theory of planetary motion around the sun, Galileo recants	1633	
Vincenzo II Gonzaga, last duke of Mantua from the main line of the Gonzaga family, sells most of the family's art collection to Charles I, king of England and Scotland	1626-27	
The new St Peter's Basilica is consecrated; Bernini is put in charge of its interior sculptural decoration, including the central baldacchino marking the high altar and grave of Saint Peter	1626	
	1613	Guido Reni, a student of the Carracci and the preeminent Bolognese painter of his time, paints the ceiling fresco <i>Aurora</i> for the Casino Rospigliosi in Rome
Galileo Galilei constructs the first astronomical telescope and observes the Milky Way, the moon, sunspots and planets, and four moons of Jupiter	1609	
<i>Orfeo</i> , Claudio Monteverdi's first opera, is performed	1607	
	1600	Caravaggio's first public commission, <i>The Calling of Saint Matthew</i> and <i>The Martyrdom of Saint Matthew</i> , are unveiled in the church of San Luigi dei Francesi, Rome
c.1585-1600 The Accademia degli Incamminati, run by Ludovico Carracci and his cousins Agostino and Annibale in Bologna, rejects Mannerism in favour of a renewed Classicizing style		

Italian Baroque artworks are theatrical, opulent and sensual. Seventeenth-century artists transformed paint and marble into emotional spectacle: limbs stretch outwards, bodies spiral, and light and shadow chisel musculature to create movement and drama. The Church and the nobility vied with each other for the greatest commissions. The former placed them in public view in some of the grandest spaces in Europe, the latter often kept their treasures behind closed doors; there, in flagrant disregard for the Church's proscription of pagan themes and nudity, erotica thrived, and connoisseurs revelled in artifice and artistic ingenuity.

Baroque artworks interact with the past. In his *Pietà* (5), Annibale Carracci (1560-1609) used luminous pink to bring Christ's dead body to life as a direct response to the cool white marble of the *Pietà* (1499) by Michelangelo (1475-1564). Italian Baroque art merges media that were once kept apart, a phenomenon known at the time as *bel composto*, or the 'beautiful whole'. In the *Adoration of the Name of Jesus* (1674-9) on the ceiling in the Church of the Gesù in Rome, Giovanni Battista Gaulli (also known as il Baciccio; 1639-1709) unifies painting, sculpture and architecture. *Swirls of light* and cherubs pierce the gilded vaulted dome, while white sculptures of cherubs push against the coffered ceiling, holding up the illusionistic threshold between Heaven and Earth. Baciccio's ceiling invites us to revel in divine and artistic splendour, whereas the dark, ominous sky and untamed forest in *Et in Arcadia Ego* ('And I am in Arcadia', an allusion to death; 2), by Guercino (1591-1666), reflects the shepherds' shock and sadness as they stumble upon a skull, a *memento mori*, reminding them that death reigns even in paradise.

Private patrons - even churchmen - broke the official rules of decorum through artworks that stimulated the senses and ignited the imagination. *Amor Vincit Omnia* (3), by Caravaggio (1571-1610), was kept behind a green silk curtain for Cardinal Vincenzo Giustiniani's private delectation. Framed by an array of decorative props and exposed by Caravaggio's signature dramatic light, known as tenebrism, the boy unabashedly exhibits his prepubescent body in the guise of Eros. Similarly, Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1598-1680) staged an erotic encounter as a dramatic push-and-pull of flesh in *Pluto and Proserpina* (1) - made for another cardinal, Scipione Borghese. Lover and object of desire react to each other like choreographed dancers: as Pluto presses his hands deeply into Proserpina's body, pulling her towards him, she exerts equal force, stretching the skin of his face as she pulls away.

The Baroque body is a performance. In *Susana and the Elders* (4), Susana's hands convey the virgin's disgust towards the Elders' lecherous gaze. Her arms shield her body yet expose her strength of mind: the muscular twist of her abdomen and her furrowed brow show the vigour of her resolve. Artemisia Gentileschi (1593-1652/3) exploited her infamous 1612 rape trial, in which her painting tutor Agostino Tassi was prosecuted, to paint both heroic, aggressive women and sensuous nudes. The nudes were much sought after by men who were aroused by a painting of a sexualized nude woman executed by a woman who had 'fallen', and as an astute businesswoman Gentileschi gave them what they wanted. Female painters also had access to something male artists had to pay huge amounts of money for: a live female model.

1 Gianlorenzo Bernini, *Pluto and Proserpina*, 1621-22
Marble, H: 260 cm / 102¼ in
Galleria Borghese, Rome

2 Giovanni Francesco Barbieri (Guercino), *Et in Arcadia Ego*, 1618-22
Oil on canvas, 82 x 91 cm / 32 x 36 in
Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica, Rome

3 Caravaggio, *Amor Vincit Omnia*, 1601-02
Oil on canvas, 156 x 113 cm / 61 x 44 in
Gemäldegalerie, Berlin

4 Artemisia Gentileschi, *Susana and the Elders*, 1610
Oil on canvas, 170 x 119 cm / 67 x 47 in
Schloss Weißenstein, Pommersfelden, Germany

5 Annibale Carracci, *Pietà*, c.1599-1600
Oil on canvas, 156 x 149 cm / 61¼ x 58¾ in
Gallerie Nazionali di Capodimonte, Naples





