

“Caravaggio and the Enfranchisement of Women. New Discoveries.”

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The article centers on Italian artist Caravaggio’s Neapolitan production, in order to show how his artworks both incorporated and propelled the epistemological shift occurring at the beginning of the seventeenth century – a shift that is understood and explained within the frame of Michel Foucault’s intellectual history. In the article, it is argued that Caravaggio’s Neapolitan paintings gave visual expression to that transition, by highlighting the persistence of Renaissance’s symbolic strategies, all the while opening to the Baroque’s predilection for an allegorical use of marginality. By focusing on the interval years between these two cultural phases and by addressing the critical conundrum generated by the recent recovery of two lost Caravaggio’s paintings, the article also sheds light on the unexpected space of freedom offered to the “disenfranchised” in the first twenty years of the seventeenth century. As Caravaggio gave larger space to social outcasts and lower classes, female figures also started playing a more significant role within his art, thus reflecting women’s more active presence in Italian society, as well as ensuing misogynist fears.

KEYWORDS: Caravaggio, *Femme fatale*, Naples, Judith, Salome, Magdalen, Works of Mercy, Foucault, Women.

The sexist backlash prompted by women’s presence on the job market and in positions of influence – that is, by their enfranchisement – is not new to the western world. From the witches of the Middle Ages to the

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