

Kimbell Art Museum

***Flesh and Blood: Masterpieces from the Capodimonte
Museum***

An Acoustiguide Tour

AR Script

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500. INTRODUCTION: DUNOUY'S VIEW OF NAPLES FROM CAPODIMONTE

ERIC LEE:

Hello, and welcome to the exhibition "Flesh and Blood: Italian Masterpieces from the Capodimonte Museum." I'm Eric Lee, Director of the Kimbell Art Museum.

Today, you'll have the extraordinary opportunity to travel to Naples...without ever leaving Fort Worth. You'll see almost forty masterpieces of Italian Renaissance and Baroque Art, all of them from the collection of the Capodimonte, one of Italy's greatest art museums.

Let's begin with this view of Naples, by the 19th century French artist Dunouy. Here's Curator Guillaume Kientz.

GUILLAUME KIENTZ:

It was very important for me to have this painting introducing the show, first of all because it embodies Naples. And actually you see the Palace of Capodimonte in the painting. The Capodimonte Museum is on a hill, [pretty much overlooking the whole city, and in the background you can see the Vesuvius, the still-active volcano that is well, it's a hallmark of Naples. And obviously the no less famous Bay of Naples.

ERIC LEE:

It's a bucolic scene...but in the distance, Mount Vesuvius threatens.

GUILLAUME KIENTZ:

This contrast, made of the coexistence of beauty and continual danger that one can see in this painting, is the hallmark of Naples, as well as the narrative of this exhibition, aptly titled 'Flesh & Blood.'

ERIC LEE:

You'll see beautiful and idealized portraits, nudes, and mythological scenes, but you'll also see paintings that are much darker, even violent.

On this audio guide, you'll hear more from curator Guillaume Kientz, alongside Babette Bohn, Professor of Art History at Texas Christian University, and Mary Vaccaro, Professor of Art History at the University of Texas at Arlington. We hope you enjoy the exhibition.

NARRATOR:

This is an Acoustiguide production.

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501. THE FARNESE FAMILY: TITIAN'S PORTRAIT OF POPE PAUL III

NARRATOR:

This portrait of Pope Paul III is by Titian, one of the most famous artists working in Europe during the 16th century. Curator Guillaume Kientz.

GUILLAUME KIENTZ:

Titian is a Venetian artist, meaning that he worked with color. And red was the color of the pope. And this painting is like a fire, representing Paul III, dressed in this very deep and powerful color that red is. And the pope is old; he's 70-five years old, but still, he looks very clever, he looks very alert, he looks very powerful, in fact. And that was the point of this portrait.

NARRATOR:

Before he was crowned Pope, Paul III was Alessandro Farnese, the head of the Farnese family—one of the wealthiest, most powerful families in Renaissance Italy. As Paul III, Alessandro became an important patron of the arts. He commissioned Michelangelo to paint *The Last Judgment* fresco in the Sistine Chapel. And he commissioned Titian to come to Rome to paint this portrait, alongside other works of art.

GUILLAUME KIENTZ:

Titian was based in Venice, so it was pretty much a big deal to get him to come to Rome. Well, obviously the pope was someone very important, so I mean, no way you can say no to the pope.

NARRATOR:

Here, the pope's hand—the one wearing the papal ring—rests on a purse: a symbol of the tremendous wealth and influence he wielded as head of the Catholic Church. He built up an incredible collection of art, and his Farnese descendants continued to add to it. Eventually, during the 18th century, the Farnese collection became the core of the Capodimonte museum's exceptional holdings of Renaissance art.

[word count: 272]

502. EL GRECO AND THE FARNESE: EL GRECO'S *GIULIO CLOVIO (AND BOY BLOWING ON EMBERS)*

GUILLAUME KIENTZ:

This is the *Portrait of Giulio Clovio*. He was a miniature painter, and he was also called the 'Michelangelo of the miniatures.' In this portrait, Giulio Clovio is pointing at his most important work, the so-called '*Farnese Hours*,' a prayer book that he decorated. He was working for the Farnese and for them, for the Cardinal Alessandro the Younger, he painted this very important and lavishly painted book that is now conserved at the Morgan Library in New York.

NARRATOR:

Cardinal Alessandro Farnese the Younger was the grandson of Pope Paul III, whose portrait you've already seen. *This* portrait was painted by El Greco, a Greek painter living in Italy. El Greco and Giulio Clovio were friends...in fact, Clovio got El Greco an invitation to stay at the Farnese palace, and that's where this portrait was painted.

GUILLAUME KIENTZ:

So we don't know exactly what was the context for this painting, but perhaps it was a way for El Greco to thank his friend for his, well, highly important recommendation to the cardinal.

NARRATOR:

El Greco painted this fairly early in his career, so it doesn't have all the hallmarks of his distinctive later style. Still though...

GUILLAUME KIENTZ:

You already can see in this portrait some of the stylistic features of El Greco's manner; for instance the pale color of the face of the sitter. Or the very dynamic landscape in the background.

NARRATOR:

Hanging to your right is another early masterpiece by El Greco, depicting a boy blowing on an ember. Look out for the way light illuminates the boy's upper body—it's a technical tour-de-force.

[word count: 261]

503. THE IMAGE OF WOMEN IN THE RENAISSANCE: PARMIGIANINO'S ANTEA (AND LUCREZIA)

NARRATOR:

Since at least the 17th century, this painting has been associated with the woman's name "Antea." Professor Mary Vaccaro.

MARY VACCARO:

What we see is this beautiful young woman who wears this fabulous outfit. It's this wonderful yellow silk garment and she has a kind of a white apron that's embroidered with blackwork.

Her face really engages us. Her eyes are wide open and she looks out as if to communicate to the viewer.

NARRATOR:

If only she could tell us who she is...because it's a bit of a mystery. In the past, scholars thought she might be a famous Roman courtesan who went by the name Antea...or even that she was the artist Parmigianino's mistress. But there's no real evidence for either claim.

MARY VACCARO:

There is an entire school of thought that this is, in fact, not even a real woman. That this is an image of an ideal beauty.

NARRATOR:

So perhaps she's an idealized young woman, about to be married. Her ungloved hand gestures toward her heart. The fur she wears was associated with fertility. And the jewelry could be gifts from her betrothed. We can't be sure—but the portrait is a wonderful example of Parmigianino's work.

MARY VACCARO:

Parmigianino was, in his own day, he was celebrated for the grace of his imagery. And in particular one critic in the 16th century said that he imbued his creations with such charm; with *una certa vaghezza* in Italian, that it made all who look upon them fall in love. And you really understand that when you look at this image.

NARRATOR:

On the wall to your left, look for another portrait of a woman by Parmigianino. She's called Lucretia, and she holds a sword to her chest. Lucretia was a Roman noblewoman who was raped by the son of the king of Rome during the late sixth century BCE.

MARY VACCARO:

And rather than dishonor herself and her family, she killed herself, which seems rather extreme for us, but was, in fact, seen as a model of female comportment. You know, of courage and of chastity, of modesty.

NARRATOR:

With her glowing skin and beautiful blond hair, she's another idealized beauty. And in this case, as so often in the Renaissance, her outer beauty was understood to reflect her inner virtue.

[word count: 374]

504. SACRED AND PROFANE LOVE: TITIAN'S *DANÄE*

GUILLAUME KIENTZ:

So this is probably one of the most famous and celebrated female nudes of the Italian Renaissance. It depicts Danaë; she was a mythological figure, very beautiful as one can see.

The most surprising element for contemporary viewers in this painting is probably the golden rain that we see at the top of the painting.

NARRATOR:

That golden cloud is the Greek god Zeus in disguise...he took this form so he could enter Danaë's bedchamber.

GUILLAUME KIENTZ:

This painting is not only interesting because of its mythological subject, it's actually very fascinating because it relates to the secret private life of Cardinal Alessandro Farnese the Younger.

NARRATOR:

It's actually a portrait of his mistress, Angela, and x-rays reveal that the artist Titian only turned it into a mythological scene after the fact. In doing so, he transformed what's clearly a very erotic female nude into something a bit more high-minded. Still, it wasn't for public viewing—in fact, the Cardinal hung it behind a curtain.

So is this painting about spiritual love—love between the gods? Or human love—love between the cardinal and his mistress? Or both?

GUILLAUME KIENTZ:

...that's where the cardinal is playing with us.

NARRATOR:

Titian's painting is one of many, many female nudes painted in Italy during the Renaissance.

GUILLAUME KIENTZ:

The fashion for female nudes came from the rediscovery of antiquities. And so representing young women naked in art was both a reference to antiquity, to

mythology, but also a way to celebrate the perfection of the human body; woman being the symbol of this perfection.

[word count: 253]

505. THE CARRACCI: A. CARRACCI'S *PIETA*

NARRATOR:

This painting is an extraordinary example of a popular devotional scene known as the "Pietà." Professor Babette Bohn.

BABETTE BOHN:

It's a timeless moment in which the Virgin Mary holds her dead son in her lap, grieves the loss of her son and reflects back on when he was a little baby who she held in her lap.

For me, this is perhaps Annibale Carracci's most moving late picture. His focus is really on the emotion and beauty of the figures. He puts a brightly illuminated, beautiful figure of Christ, whose body forms into a kind of graceful S-curve. So your attention goes right to this graceful but dead body of Christ before us. And then as you look back into the painting, you experience the reactions of the other figures. The Virgin Mary, who looks down, quietly grieving her son. Her hand reaches out in a gesture of distress.

NARRATOR:

The angels also play an important role: the one at the far right edge pricks his finger on Christ's crown of thorns.

BABETTE BOHN:

And as he pricks his finger, the little angel looks out towards us, the viewers, to signal that we are supposed to be grieving for Christ's death and sacrifice, just as the angels and the Virgin Mary are doing.

NARRATOR:

The artist, Annibale Carracci, was one of three members of the Carracci family painting in Bologna around the year 1600. At the time, the Carraccis were celebrated for the naturalism they achieved.

BABETTE BOHN:

And they did this, above all, through the practice of drawing the human figure from life. If one looks in particular at the Christ figure in the *Pietà*, there's such anatomical detail. He's moving, but he's also naturalistically accurate in terms of his anatomical representation.

NARRATOR:

The Carraccis created a kind of pictorial revolution in Italy, and they trained many artists from the next generation—including Guido Reni, whose work you'll see later on.

[word count: 314]

506. NATURALISM AND CURIOSITY: CARRACCI'S *HAIRY HARRY, MAD PETER, AND TINY AMON*

MARY VACCARO:

This is an extraordinary picture. And it's a very crowded composition.

NARRATOR:

There are three human figures: At left is Amon, a dwarf. At center is Arrigo Gonzales, who was born with a genetic condition that causes the abnormal body hair we see on his face. And at right is a jester named Pietro. Scholars have identified all three as real men who lived at the court of Cardinal Odoardo Farnese. At courts in general...

MARY VACCARO:

...there was a culture of having these kind of curiosities. Having dwarves, having buffoons.

NARRATOR:

The animals that surround the human figures suggest that these men were seen as bestial, or as exotic pets like the parrot or the monkey. But Professor Mary Vaccaro thinks it's more complicated than that.

MARY VACCARO:

I think in this particular image, we have a group of beings, right? And they are shown in a setting that is convivial. And the representation of these human figures who are different is nonetheless shown in, I think, a very dignified way, and all of these animals and these people here are interacting in a way that is peaceful and harmonious. And joyful.

NARRATOR:

We know quite a bit about the central figure, Arrigo. He married and had children. Cardinal Odoardo Farnese gave him valuable property, and even served as godfather to Arrigo's children.

MARY VACCARO:

I don't think that Arrigo was merely a possession, or a pet. I think he was much more important to the cardinal.

NARRATOR:

Like many wealthy, educated men who lived during this period of exploration and scientific discovery, the cardinal was a collector.

MARY VACCARO:

This impulse to collect and to understand is something that we see throughout the 16th and into the 17th century. And we see these cabinets of curiosity where people are collecting all kinds of objects and oddities and specimens. And so this painting, I think, fits into that mentality of trying to gather the world and understand it.

[word count: 317]

507. ARTEMISIA GENTILESCHI'S *JUDITH BEHEADING HOLOFERNES*

NARRATOR:

In this dramatic painting by Artemisia Gentileschi, the Jewish heroine Judith, in blue, is decapitating the Assyrian general Holofernes. As the biblical story goes, he'd threatened her people, so she took matters into her own hands. Babette Bohn.

BABETTE BOHN:

She gave him the impression that she was there to seduce him, and when she found herself alone in his tent, she first encouraged him to get drunk, and then, when he was a little bit out of it, she took his sword and cut off his head. And Gentileschi shows us this scene, really at the dramatic climax of the story, when Judith, assisted by her maidservant, is literally in the midst of decapitating her adversary.

NARRATOR:

The story of Judith and Holofernes was popular with artists, but Caravaggio was perhaps the only other painter to depict this most violent moment. The label includes an image of his version, which probably influenced Gentileschi's.

BABETTE BOHN:

Both Caravaggio's interpretation and Artemisia's are wonderful and dramatic and highly unusual, but I think at the end of the day, one has to conclude that Artemisia's interpretation is a much more convincing portrayal of a violent act between three people. She and her maidservant are both really throwing themselves physically into the encounter, and it's truly horrifying.

NARRATOR:

Many scholars have connected the violence of this scene with Artemisia Gentileschi's real life: As a teenager, she was raped by a friend of her father's. Again, Babette Bohn.

BABETTE BOHN:

I think one can make too much of that association. Great art is never simply autobiographical.

And for me, we do an injustice to the artist to see it simply in terms of her own victimization.

NARRATOR:

Instead, perhaps we should focus on her extraordinary career. During a time when women were generally excluded from the artistic profession...

BABETTE BOHN:

...she's one of the few women who not only managed to learn how to paint and to function as a professional artist, thanks primarily to her access to training from her father, who was also a painter, but she became, in many ways, remarkably successful and extraordinarily original.

She became almost a contradiction in terms—a famous woman artist.

[word count: 354]

508. BAROQUE IN NAPLES: CARAVAGGIO'S *THE FLAGELLATION OF CHRIST*

GUILLAUME KIENTZ:

In 1606, a very turbulent artist, Michelangelo Merisi, better known today as Caravaggio, settled in Naples. In fact, he was fleeing from Rome when he accidentally killed a man during a duel, making him a wanted murderer.

NARRATOR:

A few years later, Caravaggio painted this soon-to-be-violent scene, intended for display in a Naples church. It's a kind of prelude to Christ's crucifixion. The man on the left holds Christ by his hair, while the man on the right ties him to a column. At lower left, a third man readies a bundle of sticks. But a bright shaft of light illuminates Christ, so that our eyes go to him first...and *then* to the soldiers who brutalize him.

GUILLAUME KIENTZ:

Settling in Naples, Caravaggio also imported his singular and famous manner characterized by a sharp chiaroscuro, which means a contrast of light and dark.

Caravaggio is also famous for his violent compositions, with many realistic details.

NARRATOR:

Here, the assailants don't wear classical Roman attire. Instead, Caravaggio has dressed them in clothing that 17th century viewers would have recognized as contemporary. He's brought this biblical scene right up to the present, imbuing it with a harrowing immediacy.

Caravaggio's style—his realism and his use of chiaroscuro – was incredibly influential on a younger generation of artists in Naples. You'll see some examples of that influence as you continue through the exhibition.

[word count: 225]

509. CLASSICISM: GUIDO RENI'S ATALANTA AND HIPPOMENES

NARRATOR:

In this scene from ancient Roman myth, the female figure Atalanta, famous for her speed, is racing the male figure, Hippomenes. She'd taken a vow of chastity, and was only willing to marry a man who could outrun her. Enter Hippomenes.

BABETTE BOHN:

You could really say he cheated in the race, because Aphrodite gave him three golden apples, and each time he fell behind in the race, he would throw one of the golden apples on the ground, and Atalanta would stop to pick it up, and so he would gain on her in the race. And this is what Reni has represented, although as you can see, he represents this subject in a decidedly peculiar way.

NARRATOR:

No one really seems to be running. Instead, it's a very stylized version of the scene. Classical draperies billow elegantly, and Reni has carefully positioned Atalanta and Hippomenes to create a sense of compositional equilibrium. Babette Bohn.

BABETTE BOHN:

So it's a beautiful composition, the figures are beautiful, but when you examine them a little more closely, some portions are more naturalistically convincing than others.

I would argue that Hippomenes is a naturalistic, but highly idealized male nude figure. It's a convincing naturalistic body. Reni was a Carracci student, and like the Carracci, he drew the human figure from life.

The figure of Atalanta, if one looks closely, she's much less convincing as a naturalistic female body than her companion is. And I would bet a lot of money that Guido Reni never drew a female nude from life. Not only because the practice was less common in Italian workshops, but also according to his early biographers, he had an almost pathological fear of women.

NARRATOR:

For example, one day, a basket of Reni's clean laundry arrived back at his studio.

BABETTE BOHN:

And to Reni's horror, they discovered a woman's blouse mixed in with the laundry. And Reni insisted that everything needed to be rewashed in pure water, and he never sent the laundry out again.

He was incredibly neurotic and strange and difficult to work with...

NARRATOR:

But he was also the most famous painter of 17th century Italy—much more sought after than Caravaggio at the time.

BABETTE BOHN:

Guido Reni was referred to as 'divine' by his contemporaries. And he received the highest prices for his paintings of any Italian painter of the day.

[word count: 386]

510. RIBERA AND HIS SCHOOL: JUSEPE DE RIBERA'S *DRUNKEN SILENUS*

NARRATOR:

In this ribald painting by Jusepe de Ribera, the mythological figure Silenus holds up his cup of wine for a refill. But our eyes go straight to his belly.

GUILLAUME KIENTZ:

What is unusual in the painter's approach is that he is not trying to make the gods look nice, handsome, perfect. On the contrary, he depicts them as fat-bellied, realistic; in a way ugly. So it's opposing with the traditional idea we have about the world of gods and goddesses.

And it's not only about mythology; Ribera was an artist active in Naples. He totally embraced the aesthetic of Caravaggio, which is realistic, cruel, very harsh in representation. And this new tradition in painting, opposed at the time to the classical one, who tried to idealize the bodies, to idealize the images. So it's more than only a mythological painting; it's actually an art manifesto.

NARRATOR:

The classical, idealizing tradition is epitomized by Guido Reni's *Atalanta and Hippomenes*, hanging close by. So these two very different works, both completed during the same decade, embody the two very different styles of painting which developed side-by-side in 17th-century Italy.

Both styles of painting appealed to private collectors. And this one was owned by Gaspar Roomer, a wealthy Flemish merchant living in Naples. Like other collectors at the time, he was interested in curiosities. In that sense, this painting, with its fixation on the god's corpulent body, seems to come out of the same tradition as the portrait of *Hairy Harry*, *Mad Peter*, and *Tiny Amon* you saw previously.

[word count: 254]

511. STILL-LIFES: RECCO'S *STILL-LIFE WITH A HEAD OF A BILLY GOAT*

NARRATOR:

In Italy, still life paintings like this one had long been placed at the bottom of the artistic hierarchy. Because they depicted everyday objects, they didn't seem as exalted as religious or mythological scenes, or portraits of powerful people. But during this period, that began to change.

GUILLAUME KIENTZ:

In the 17th century, Naples was the second-largest city in Europe, and therefore a very active and rich center. And following the examples of the princes, wealthy people started to collect and commission art.

NARRATOR:

These new collectors wanted decorative paintings to adorn their homes, and they created a new market for highly-accomplished still lifes.

GUILLAUME KIENTZ:

And this painting is a perfect example of that. It's still a very realistic depiction of a daily life kitchen scene, but the accuracy of the display of the elements in the composition clearly seeks elegance and wants to please the eyes. Look at the beautiful blue-and-white Dutch plate that is in the middle of the composition. Or look how the artist plays with the shapes, textures, and light, with a very tactile precision to appeal to the viewer's faculties of sight, touch, and taste.

NARRATOR:

It's a feast for our eyes, but the tactility also appeals to our sense of touch, and the food and wine to our sense of taste and smell.

[musical transition]

ERIC LEE:

We hope you've enjoyed this special exhibition, and that you'll leave with a greater appreciation for the beauty of Italian art from the 16th and 17th centuries. If you're ever in Naples, be sure to visit the Capodimonte Museum.

[word count: 253]

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