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Ressort: Kunst, Kultur und Musik

The National Gallery: vitrine of the Italian Renaissance

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The National Gallery of London will be next spring the vitrine of the Italian Renaissance from March 15 through June 25 with the 'Michelangelo and Sebastiano' Credit Suisse Exhibition. The Exhibition will be a great opportunity to explore the extraordinary relationship between two great Italian masters, Michelangelo and Sebastiano del Piombo. They worked together in the aggressively competitive Renaissance Rome.

They first met in Rome in 1511 when Michelangelo was working on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. The creative partnership and friendship between the two artists with their radically different approaches and talent will be on display for the first time. According to Vasari, Michelangelo befriended Sebastiano and offered pictorial designs for him to develop in paint. The Renaissance masterworks for which this is alleged are: the Pietà in the church of the Conventuali, Viterbo; the Transfiguration and the Flagellation in the Borgherini Chapel of the church of San Pietro in Montorio, Rome; and, most celebrated of all, the Raising of Lazarus, now in the National Gallery, London.

This grand work, remarkable for general strength of pictorial perception, is more than 3.5 by 2.5 meters, with the principal life-size figures transferred from wood to canvas in 1771.

It was painted in 1517-1519 for Giulio de Medici, for the bishop of Narbonne, afterwards Pope Clement VII; and it remained in Narbonne cathedral until purchased by the duke of Orleans early in the eighteenth century, coming to England with the Orleans Collection in 1792.

It is generally admitted that the design of Michelangelo emerges in the figure of Lazarus and of those who are concerned with him (two sketches of the Lazarus considered as Michelangelo's handwork are now in the British Museum) but whether he really touched the panel is still regarded as more than doubtful, as he left Rome about the time when this work of art was initiated. Raphael's Transfiguration was painted for the same patron and the same destination.

The two works were exhibited together, and some admirers did not scruple to give the preference to Sebastiano. His Flagellation of Christ, though ordinarily termed a fresco, is, according to Vasari, painted in oil upon the wall.

This was a method first practiced by Domenico Veneziano, and later by other artists; but Sebastiano alone succeeded in preventing the blackening of the colours. The design for the figure of Christ has long been supposed by many to have been supplied by Michelangelo.

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Annette-Kolb-Str. 16
D-85055 Ingolstadt
Telefon: +49 (0) 841-951. 99.660
Telefax: +49 (0) 841-951. 99.661
Email: contact@european-news-agency.com
Internet: european-news-agency.com

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Through about 70 works of art including paintings, sculpture, drawings and letters, the National Gallery exhibition documents a professional relationship that lasted for over 25 years and does not shy away from times of both triumph and disappointment suffered by both Michelangelo and Sebastiano del Piombo.

Among the major works presented to the public in the exhibition is the 'Pietà' for San Francesco in Viterbo (c.1512-16), which marked the beginning of the collaboration between the two, the decoration of the Borgherini Chapel in San Pietro in Montorio a Roma (1516 -24) and the 'Raising of Lazarus' (1517-19) by Sebastiano del Piombo, painted for the Cathedral of Narbonne and in which Michelangelo intervened only at an advanced stage of the painting, and 'Christ the Redeemer', a monumental marble sculpture made by Michelangelo in 1514-15 and loaned by the S. Vincenzo Martire Church in Bassano Romano.

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**Redaktioneller Programmdienst:
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Annette-Kolb-Str. 16
D-85055 Ingolstadt
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