

READING 1.1 OLD REPORTS ABOUT CARAVAGGIO, IN THE ORIGINAL AND IN TRANSLATION

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Source: Hibbard, H., 1983. *Caravaggio*, London: Thames and Hudson, pp.343–87. Grateful acknowledgement is made to this source for permission to reproduce material.

The texts that follow are the basic early writings concerning Caravaggio, ranging from Van Mander's short notice published in 1604 to Susinno's manuscript *Life* dated 1724. [...]

1 Carel van Mander

Van Mander (1548–1606), born in Flanders, was in Italy from 1573 to 1577 and settled in Haarlem in 1583. He was the first Netherlandish theoretician of art and made an effort to collect accurate biographical material about painters from his native land. He also wrote lives of Italian artists, including the earliest coherent notice of Caravaggio, in 'Het Leven der Moderne oft dees-tejtsche doorluchtighe Italiaensche Schilders ... Het tweedde Boeck van het Leven der Schilders,' which forms Part III of *Het Schilder-Boeck ...* (Haarlem, 1604, 191 r). Van Mander's manuscript is dated Alkmaar, 1603, which gives the latest date for his information. See Helen Noë, *Carel van Mander en Italië* (The Hague, 1954; Caravaggio's *Life* is on her pp.292–294). The reference to paintings in San Lorenzo in Damaso by Giuseppe Cesari seems to be correct; but the story of Caravaggio's dwarf nearby is erroneous. It may signal a confusion with the frescoes by Cesari in the Contarelli Chapel, San Luigi dei Francesi, where Caravaggio added side paintings that were unveiled in July 1600.

There is also a certain Michelangelo da Caravaggio, who is doing extraordinary things in Rome; like Giuseppe [Cesari d'Arpino] previously mentioned, he has climbed up from poverty through hard work and by taking on everything with foresight and courage, as some do who will not be held back by faint-heartedness or lack of courage, but who push themselves forward boldly and fearlessly and who everywhere seek their advantage boldly. This enterprise deserves no blame if it is undertaken with honest propriety and discretion, for Lady Luck will rarely come to those who do not help themselves, and usually we must seek her out and prod her on. This Michelangelo has already [overcome adversity to] earn reputation, a good name, and honor with his works. He painted a history in San Lorenzo in Damaso, next to one by Guiseppe, as described in his *Life*. In it he painted a dwarf or midget who sticks out his tongue at Giuseppe's painting, making it seem as if in this way he wanted to ridicule Giuseppe's work: he is one who thinks little of the works of other masters, but will not openly praise his own. His belief is that all art is nothing but a bagatelle or children's work, whatever it is and whoever it is by, unless it is done after life, and that we can do no better than to follow Nature. Therefore he will not make a single brushstroke without the close study of life, which he copies and paints. This is surely no bad way of achieving a good end: for to paint after drawing, however close it may be to life, is not as good as following Nature with all her various colors. Of course one should have achieved a degree of understanding that would allow one to distinguish the most beautiful of life's beauties and select it. But one must also take the chaff with the grain: thus, he does not study his art constantly, so that after two weeks of work he will sally forth for two months together with his rapier at his side and his servant-boy after him,

going from one tennis court to another, always ready to argue or fight, so that he is impossible to get along with. This is totally foreign to Art; for Mars and Minerva have never been good friends. Yet as for his painting, it is very delightful and an exceptionally beautiful style, one for our young artists to follow.

Appendix attached to a later edition: I have been misinformed that Michelangelo Caravaggio made fun of the work of Giuseppino by painting that dwarf.