

Ryan D. Pacheco

Mr. Greco

English III

27 September 2023

Art Under a Microscope

In “Art Never Dies,” Sonny Rollins, a famous Jazz saxophonist, asserts that art, like life itself, has an eternal quality, and it continues to inspire and connect with people across generations. Rollins holds the belief that art transcends, spanning through multiple generations, and has the ability to evoke enduring emotions that defines the complexity that it means to be human. Sonny reasons “We see themes and ideas repeat over many lifetimes; those ideas don’t belong to any one person, and as they evolve, disappear and reappear”. By this Rollins suggests that art is timeless and will always continue to ignite emotions in humans for as long as humanity is alive. Art is capable of transcending multiple generations while retaining its power to leave a profound and enduring impact on humanity.

Rollins' ideology corroborates with the renowned baroque style artist Carravaggio more specifically the works of *Judith beheading holofernes*, *Medusa*, and *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas*. Carravagios art is able to invoke intense and meaningful emotions out of humans even 400 years after Carravaggios death in 1610. Over the course of Carravagio’s short lifetime he produced a magnitude of creative pieces that fall into the baroque movement of art which occurred during the 17th and 18th centuries. Caravaggio employed a sense of intense realism in his paintings, most of which were religious-themed paintings, often depicting graphic and surreal scenes.



Fig 1 "Judith Beheading Holofernes" (1599)

<https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/judith-and-holofernes-artemisia-gentileschi/oQF3gDEYNkutBA?hl=en>

In Figure one, Caravaggio effectively conveys a profound sense of emotion in Holoferne's facial depression. According to the Bible, Holofernes was a great Assyrian general who met his fate when Judith beheaded him. According to the story, Judith, who was from Israel, infiltrated the Assyrian camp and executed Holofernes while he was intoxicated. Caravaggio used a sophisticated color palette of vivid colors to invoke certain and deep emotions within us. The most prominent color is the red, more notably the intense red velvet blanket and the dark stained blood splatter on the bed. In addition, Caravaggio used a great sense of detail to also help portray the emotions of shock and anguish. Holofernes' wide-opened eyes and mouth, along with the visible wrinkles and creases on his forehead, depict his attempt to comprehend the unfolding events before it's too late.



Fig 2 "Medusa" (1595-1598)

<https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/medusa-caravaggio-merisi/FAFPqU12CekL8Q?hl=en>

Moreover Caravaggio has produced many artistic and creative pieces over the years but one of his most notable pieces is "Medusa" (see Fig 2). Unlike *Judith Beheading Holofernes*, *Medusa* was actually painted on a shield and it was gifted to the grand duke of Ferdinando I. Unfortunately the grand duke didn't like it too much because it was said to have sat in a storage room for two-hundred years. Moreover Caravaggio carefully organized the shield in such a way that each individual snake tells a different story and enacts a different emotion. The amount of detail added to the painting is impeccable, you can even see the scales on each snake and the glare in Medusa's eye. Caravaggio uses a great deal of Texture, Color, And Form. At first glance I was immediately attracted to the red blood splatter and also the facial expression of medusa. In addition the different contrasting colors of red, green, and black helps people immerse themselves into the reality of this intriguing piece. It reinforces that the

main focus point of the painting is the sword beheading holofernes. The color scheme helps us focus on what isn't important and zone in on what is important.



Fig 3 "The Incredulity of Saint Thomas" (1601-1602)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Incredulity_of_Saint_Thomas_\(Caravaggio\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Incredulity_of_Saint_Thomas_(Caravaggio))

In "The Incredulity of Saint Thomas" (see Fig 3), Caravaggio portrays three apostles: Thomas, Saint Peter, and Saint John. Thomas is seen sticking his finger into Jesus' torso where the proclaimed nails were said to be. Thomas and the other apostles seem to be looking on in awe as Thomas' finger is piercing through Jesus. According to the Gospel of John, Thomas, the Apostle, was absent during one of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances. He famously once said, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were and my hand into his side, I will not believe". This painting is extremely old and it shows, the paint is chipping away and the color is slowly becoming lighter. Carravaggio used a clean palette of lighter colors and a low value to make sure the first thing that people look at is Saint Thomas' hand

perforating Jesus' torso. Additionally, the shape of Jesus' abdomen ripping open, is jarring. There is no blood and it looks as if Thomas' hand is being absorbed by Jesus' torso like playdoh. The repetition of all three Apostles depicting the same unsettling look on their face adds another layer of eeriness to this outlandish piece of art.

These pieces of art by Carravagio all work together to further corroborate the main theme Caravaggio's work showcases not just a painting but a whole story and deeper meaning beneath the paint on canvas. Alternative to other artists at the time, Carravagio uses darker colors and intense emotions on his characters' faces to further impact the onlookers of Caravaggio's work. Sonny Rollins' message that art serves as a universally understood language capable of resonating on individuals on multiple different scales relates to Carvragio's baroque style of art. Carravagio's artistic style employs colors and emotions that evoke viewers' personal experiences, making a connection between the art and each viewer.