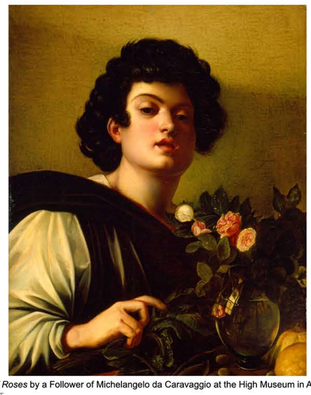
Scholar Dishes About Finding a Long-Lost Caravaggio Painting in Paris



BY DANIEL CASSADY

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Boy with a Carafe of Roses by a Follower of Michelangelo da Caravaggio at the High Museum in Atlanta
HIGH MUSEUM OF ART

On a gray winter day in Paris three years ago, art historian Maria Cristina Terzaghi walked into the back room of a Parisian gallery and came face-to-face with a painting that had been missing for nearly two centuries. The picture was covered in grime, but she recognized it right away: *Young Man with a Carafe of Roses*, a work believed to have been painted by Caravaggio in the 1590s.

Terzaghi, a professor at Roma Tre University and one of the world's leading Caravaggio scholars, has now offered her most detailed account yet of the discovery. Writing in *La Repubblica* on Sunday, she explained why she believes the painting is an original by the Italian Baroque master, rather than one of the copies that have intrigued art historians for decades.

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The painting shows a curly-haired young man in a white shirt leaning against a table covered with fruit, an artichoke, and a glass carafe filled with roses. His mouth hangs just slightly open. One eyebrow is raised, like he's about to say something. Look closely at the carafe, and there's another surprise: reflected in the glass are a window and the figure of another young man, possibly Caravaggio himself.

The composition has fascinated scholars for nearly a century. Four old copies are known to exist, including one at the High Museum of Art in Atlanta, but the original had apparently vanished. According to Terzaghi, the newly identified canvas is that missing painting, made around 1596 or 1597, when Caravaggio was in his twenties and beginning to establish his reputation in Rome.

Her research found that the painting appeared in a 1607 inventory of works belonging to Giuseppe Cesari, known as Cavalier d'Arpino, whose workshop employed the young Caravaggio. Cesari eventually ran into trouble with papal authorities after being accused of illegally possessing weapons and orchestrating a street brawl that "disfigured a painter" named Pomarancio. He surrendered his art collection to escape prosecution, and the works eventually passed to Cardinal Scipione Borghese, nephew of Pope Paul V.

The painting was recorded in the Borghese collection in 1693, and Terzaghi believes it remained with the family until at least 1831, when restrictions that had previously prevented its sale had passed.

After that, the trail goes cold.

By the early twentieth century, the painting had made its way into the holdings a Paris bookseller. Following his death, his widow put the work up for auction in 1909—cataloged simply as a work by an anonymous Italian painter. An ancestor of the current owners bought it, and it has remained in the family ever since.

Terzaghi believes the painting is closely connected to Caravaggio's *Boy Bitten by a Lizard*, another early work showing a young man alongside an elaborate still life. Scholars have previously suggested that the two compositions might belong to a series representing the five senses, with the lizard representing touch and the roses representing smell.

For Terzaghi, the painting's quality is the best evidence of its authenticity. She points to the young man's expressive face, the shimmering white fabric of his shirt, and the remarkable handling of light passing through the water-filled carafe. The floral arrangement also bears a striking resemblance to a description of Caravaggio's work by his contemporary and rival Giovanni Baglione, who recalled the artist's extraordinary treatment of water, glass, and flowers covered in dew.

The discovery isn't entirely new to the art historical world. In January 2025, Spain's *Ars Magazine* reported that a French family believed it owned the missing Caravaggio. Terzaghi also alluded to the painting in the catalog for the *Caravaggio 2025* exhibition in Rome. Her account in *La Repubblica*, however, offers a much fuller explanation of the attribution and the provenance research behind it.

There are still questions, particularly about how the painting traveled from Italy to France. And as with almost any newly attributed Caravaggio, other specialists will need to assess the evidence before the work can gain wider acceptance.

The news comes during an unusually busy few days for Caravaggio scholars. On Saturday, another Italian art historian, Gianni Papi, attributed a *Portrait of a Young Man* to the artist during a conference in Montepulciano.That painting had previously been sold at Dorotheum as a work from the 16th-century Tuscan school. Papi has yet to publish the evidence supporting his claim.

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