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Minneapolis Institute of Art Acquires Four Baroque Italian Paintings Commissioned by the Barberini Family

Monumental works by Cavaliere d'Arpino, Cristoforo Roncalli, and Domenico Passignano, and a devotional painting by Paolo Guidotti significantly enhance the museum's collection of 17th-century painting

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Cavaliere d'Arpino, Italian (Rome, 1568-1640), *The Archangel Michael*, ca. 1624-1626. Oil on canvas. Gift of funds from Elizabeth and Whitney MacMillan in honor of Patrick Noon and his curatorial contributions to the Minneapolis Institute of Art, 2020.53

MINNEAPOLIS—September 29, 2021—The Minneapolis Institute of Art (Mia) today announced the acquisition of four paintings commissioned by the prominent and influential Barberini family of Rome in the 1620s. The paintings—*The Archangel Michael* (c. 1624-26) by Cavaliere d'Arpino, *Jacob Wrestling with the Angel* (early 1620s) by Cristoforo Roncalli, *The Expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise* (1627) by Domenico Passignano, and *The Crucified Christ Triumphant over Death, Evil, and Sin* (1621) by Paolo Guidotti—evoke the splendor of Baroque Rome in the seventeenth century and the triumphant message of the Catholic Church during the Counter-Reformation. The Barberini family's patronage represents one of the peaks of this era. The paintings by Arpino, Roncalli, and Passignano, all monumental in scale, have remained together for more than 400 years with direct descendants of the Barberini princes and the Barberini Pope Urban VIII (reign 1623-1644). The works by Arpino and Guidotti are now on view at Mia, while the paintings by Roncalli and Passignano are currently undergoing conservation.

"The acquisition of these four paintings significantly enhances Mia's collection of Italian painting, seventeenth-century Baroque art, and Catholic interpretations of age-old religious themes," said Katie Lubber, PhD, Nivin and Duncan MacMillan Director and President of Mia. "We are particularly excited to have these four paintings join one of Mia's greatest old master paintings, Nicolas Poussin's *Death of Germanicus*, also commissioned around the same time by the Barberini family. The dramatic subject

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matter, impeccable provenance, and excellent condition of these four works—particularly Cavaliere d'Arpino's *Archangel Michael*—make the paintings an extraordinary addition to our collection.”

Three of the works were acquired from Hazlitt Gallery in London. Mia purchased Cavaliere d'Arpino's *Archangel Michael*, while Cristoforo Roncalli's *Jacob Wrestling with the Angel* and Domenico Passignano's *Expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise* were gifts. The accessions were made in honor of Mia's former paintings curator Patrick Noon, who worked at the museum for 22 years and contributed tremendously to the study and growth of Mia's collection. The panel painting by Paolo Guidotti, *The Crucified Christ Triumphant over Death, Evil, and Sin*, was purchased from Lullo Pampoulides in London.

Cavaliere d'Arpino (1568–1640) moved to Rome as a young prodigy, executing frescoes in the Vatican palace at the age of 15. He became one of the most prominent painters in the city, working for a succession of popes and private patrons. The grand *Archangel Michael* may have been executed by Arpino to get in the good graces of Urban VIII. The Barberini pope personally identified with the Archangel as defender of the Catholic faith and papal authority against heresy and Protestantism. He chose the saint's feast day for his papal coronation, and images of the Archangel were represented on his papal medals. Mia's classicizing painting shows Saint Michael already victorious, his bejeweled foot planted triumphantly upon a prostrate Lucifer. The work is in an exceptional state of preservation. Arpino imbued the saint with extraordinary physical presence, giving considerable descriptive detail to his wings, costume, and flesh, all without sacrificing elegance.

Like Arpino, Cristoforo Roncalli (c. 1553–1626) enjoyed extensive papal patronage. He is best known for his religious paintings and mosaic decoration in Rome, and his frescoes in the basilica of the Holy House of Loreto (Marche, Italy), an important Catholic pilgrimage site. Roncalli and Arpino were fierce artistic rivals, competing for prestigious papal commissions in the newly built basilica of Saint Peter's. Both artists were knighted by popes for their artistic contributions. Roncalli's dreamlike *Jacob Wrestling with the Angel* depicts Jacob's encounter with an angel on his journey home to Canaan. They wrestled until dawn, and the angel blessed Jacob and named him Israel. Roncalli favored energetic, bold forms and dramatic contrasts of light and shade. Here in the nighttime setting he highlighted the angel against Jacob's darker silhouette, illuminating the pale flesh, yellow drapery, and iridescent wings with strong light. The picture was likely commissioned by Cardinal Maffeo Barberini before he became Pope Urban VIII.

The Tuscan painter Domenico Passignano (1559–1638) led a successful career in Florence and Rome during the Counter-Reformation. At this time, the Church prized paintings with a clear message that inspired devotion in viewers. Passignano's naturalistic style lent itself to these goals. He was one of the favored painters of Urban VIII during his cardinalate. Passignano's *Expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise* was commissioned by the pope's nephew, Cardinal Francesco Barberini in 1627, who also commissioned Poussin's *Death of Germanicus* the same year. The sensual, earthy treatment of Adam and Eve's bodies in the *Expulsion* is characteristic of Passignano's manner; the banished figures seem to despair to the point of physical pain. The meticulously rendered fig leaves covering their nakedness and lush landscape of Eden add immediacy to the work.

Paolo Guidotti (c. 1560–1629) was a true Renaissance man. Interested in flying machines, he made wings from whale bones, feathers, and springs and attempted to fly off a roof, breaking his leg. To study anatomy, he reportedly removed body parts from recently buried corpses. He also practiced architecture and law. *Crucified Christ Triumphant over Death, Evil, and Sin* typifies Guidotti's expressive, haunting style and erudite approach. The tragic scene is set in the darkness of night, with a heap of vanquished figures depicted at Christ's feet: Death, represented as a skeleton; Evil, represented as the Devil or Lucifer; and Sin or Flesh, symbolized by the bound, naked figures of Adam and Eve. The six mourning women represent the six Maries—devout figures in the bible with Mary in their name—among them the Virgin Mary, in the blue mantle at left, and Mary Magdalene, kneeling at Christ's feet. Signed and dated 1621 on the verso, this small devotional painting was likely made for Urban two years before he became pope.

These four pictures are all recorded in inventories of the Barberini collection throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Following Urban's election in 1623, the family began construction on a vast new palace with the city's leading architects (today the Gallerie Nazionali Barberini Corsini, Rome) and built one of the most important private collections of art in Rome. Urban VIII was infamous for his nepotism. Over his two-decade reign, he enriched his family beyond precedent, bestowing his brothers and nephews with titles, political appointments, benefices, and desirable marriages, making his family one of the wealthiest and most powerful in Rome. “The Barberini's exploitation of papal power and funds for personal gain is undeniable, says Rachel McGarry, Associate Curator in Mia's Arts of Europe department, “but so is the lasting impact of their patronage. The Barberini family reshaped the artistic and cultural scenes of Rome, creating some of the city's most celebrated monuments. Their influence extended well beyond the Alps, to the Catholic courts of Europe, and can be traced into the eighteenth century.”

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The vivid colors, dynamic lighting, and dramatic storytelling of Mia's four new paintings visually represent the magnificence, sophistication, and theatricality of this period of Roman art. With these acquisitions, Mia's collection now includes six major paintings from the Barberini collection: the four new acquisitions, *The Death of Germanicus* by Poussin, and *Adam Discovering the Body of Abel* (1640s) by Andrea Sacchi and his workshop. Additionally, the museum has several significant tapestries from the Barberini collection, including the significant and immense *Apollo and Attendants Flaying Marsyas* (c. 1661-62) made in the Barberini private tapestry workshop and woven under the direction of the accomplished female weaver Maria Maddalena della Riviera (active 1653-1678).



Left: Cristoforo Roncalli (il Pomarancio), Italian (Tuscany, c. 1553-1626). *Jacob Wrestling with the Angel*, early 1620s. Oil on canvas. Gift of John Morton Morris in honor of Patrick Noon, 2020.54.1

Center: Domenico Passignano, Italian (Florence, 1559-1638). *The Expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise*, 1627. Oil on canvas. Gift of John Morton Morris in honor of Patrick Noon, 2020.54.2

Right: Paolo Guidotti, called Cavalier Borghese, Italian, (Lucca c. 1560-1629 Rome). *Crucified Christ Triumphant over Death, Evil and Sin*, 1621. Oil on walnut panel. The Putnam Dana McMillian fund, 2021.17

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About the Minneapolis Institute of Art

Home to more than 90,000 works of art representing 5,000 years of world history, the Minneapolis Institute of Art (Mia) inspires wonder, spurs creativity, and nourishes the imagination. With extraordinary exhibitions and one of the finest art collections in the country—from all corners of the globe, and from ancient to contemporary—Mia links the past to the present, enables global conversations, and offers an exceptional setting for inspiration.

General admission to Mia is always free. Some special exhibitions have a nominal admission fee.

Museum Hours

Thursday-Sunday

10am–5pm

Monday-Wednesday

Closed

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