

Caravaggio

Aestas Infinity



12 PLATES · 2 COVERS · 16:9 · HOUSE OF CANDLE · LTD 100

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Twelve plates

Twelve paintings in the order they were made, 1593 to 1608, and two covers. The line under the title says whether the plate is after the painting or only set beside it.

About this edition. Twelve plates and two covers after Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1571–1610), in order of date: Boy with a Basket of Fruit, Bacchus, Medusa, Judith, Narcissus, The Calling of Saint Matthew, The Supper at Emmaus, The Entombment, Saint Jerome Writing, Death of the Virgin, David with the Head of Goliath and The Beheading of Saint John the Baptist. Each plate lights the painting with a single candle and says what it adds. The essay that comes first takes about six minutes to read; each plate takes one.

Read the essay first

13 Front cover

The cover. The wax, declared.

01 The boy and the basket

After Boy with a Basket of Fruit, Borghese.

02 The glass of wine

After Bacchus, Uffizi.

03 The shield

After Medusa, Uffizi.

04 The sword lowered

Set beside Judith, Barberini.

05 The pool

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06 The beam

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07 The supper

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14 Back cover

The seal.

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Caravaggio

Milan, 1571. Porto Ercole, 18 July 1610.

Michelangelo Merisi was born in Milan in 1571 and took the name of the town his family came from, Caravaggio. He trained in Milan with Simone Peterzano and was in Rome by the early 1590s. His first public commission, the Contarelli Chapel in San Luigi dei Francesi, made his name in 1599–1600. In May 1606 he killed Ranuccio Tomassoni in a brawl and fled Rome. He worked in Naples, Malta and Sicily, and he died in 1610 at Porto Ercole, on his way back.

This book is twelve paintings in the order they were made, and two covers. Each plate has a painting behind it, in a museum or a church. The frame is not that painting. Where the two disagree, both facts are printed. The pictures themselves were made with AI tools; the methods stay private.

The House of Candle

One flame, and the dark around it.

Caravaggio's light is a decision: a single source from one side, the rest of the picture left in shadow. The edition takes that literally. Each plate is lit by candles in a room of wet stone and heavy cloth, with gold dust hanging in the air and crimson in the drapes. Every figure is clothed. No text sits inside any picture.

The candles, the dust and the rooms are added. The figures, the gestures and the light that falls on them are Caravaggio's. The line under each plate says which is which, and says plainly when a plate is only set beside a painting.

Rome

1593 to 1600.

The Boy with a Basket of Fruit comes from the workshop of Cavaliere d'Arpino. Bacchus and the Medusa shield belong to the circle of Cardinal del Monte, the Medusa given to the Grand Duke of Tuscany. The Judith was painted for the banker Ottavio Costa, and the Narcissus, still debated, is in the Barberini. With the Calling of Saint Matthew in the Contarelli Chapel, the beam of light enters the church.

Altars

1601 to 1606.

The Supper at Emmaus (1601) is in London, the Entombment (1602–03) in the Vatican, and the Death of the Virgin, rejected by the friars who ordered it, in the Louvre. Saint Jerome Writing, of 1605–06, is in the Borghese,

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where for two centuries it was attributed to someone else. These are paintings made for a room and hung in another, and the plates stay with the room.

Flight

1606 to 1610.

After the killing of 1606 the pictures darken and thin out. The Beheading of Saint John the Baptist, painted in Malta in 1608, is his largest canvas and the only one he signed. David with the Head of Goliath, of 1609–10, puts his own face on the severed head. These two plates are set beside the paintings rather than after them, and the line under each says what is missing.

The wax

A mark that only drips.

The mark of this edition is a small drop of gold wax in the shape of an infinity sign. In the twelve plates it is hidden in a basket, a glass, a sleeve, a pool, a tabletop, and you have to look. On the two covers it is large and declared, and on the David plate it is large too. It is not announced. It only drips. Look at the picture first.

What the museums hold

Paintings, not pictures of paintings.

A plate may move a painting again. What it may not do is put a new object in the frame and let the reader think Caravaggio put it there. Where a plate adds something, the line under the picture says so. Where the book and the museum disagree, both facts are printed.



01 The boy and the basket

1593 · BORGHESE

After Boy with a Basket of Fruit, about 1593–94. Oil on canvas, 70 × 67 cm, Galleria Borghese, Rome. The boy and the basket are Caravaggio's. The candle, the wet stone, the gold dust and the wax mark are added.

Boy with a Basket of Fruit at the Galleria Borghese

A boy in a crimson doublet trimmed with gold holds a heavy basket of fruit against his chest, peaches, grapes and apples with leaves still on them. Behind him is a wall of wet dark stone. A single candle burns low at the lower right, and gold dust hangs in the air above its flame.

Caravaggio painted the Boy with a Basket of Fruit in Rome in the early 1590s, when he was working in the workshop of Cavaliere d'Arpino. It is 70 by 67 centimetres. In 1607 Scipione Borghese took it, with the rest of d'Arpino's collection, and it has stayed in the Borghese collection since.

In the painting the dark ground is empty and the fruit does the lighting. The plate puts one candle in it and wets the stone. The boy's look, aside and a little tired, is Caravaggio's. The candle, the dust and the small wax drop in the shape of an infinity sign at the basket's rim are the edition's.

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02 The glass of wine

1596 · UFFIZI

After Bacchus, about 1596–97. Oil on canvas, 95 × 85 cm, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence. The youth, the bowl of fruit and the carafe are Caravaggio's. The candles, the curtain and the dust are added.

Bacchus at the Uffizi

A young man crowned with vine leaves stands behind a stone table in a crimson velvet doublet, a glass of dark wine raised in one hand. Grapes and figs lie in front of him. Rows of candles burn on shelves and ledges behind, a heavy red curtain falls at the right, and gold dust settles on the back of his hand.

Caravaggio painted Bacchus about 1596–97 in the circle of Cardinal Francesco Maria del Monte. It later passed to the Medici and was rediscovered in the Uffizi storerooms in 1913. The painting is 95 by 85 centimetres. The fruit in it is already bruised, and the wine stands at the brim: invitation and decay at once.

The plate keeps the glass and the fruit and fills the dark with candles, so the wine looks black, then crimson, then gold. The costume is the plate's own, closed to the throat. The candles, the curtain and the wax mark on the glass are added.

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03 The shield

1597 · UFFIZI

After Medusa, about 1597. Oil on canvas mounted on a convex wooden shield, about 60 cm, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence. The head is Caravaggio's. The bearer, the candelabra and the dust are added.

Medusa at the Uffizi

A woman in a crimson and gold gown stands holding a round green shield in front of her, and on the shield is a Medusa's head with its mouth open in a scream and snakes writhing. Candelabras stand on both sides, a red curtain hangs behind, and gold dust drifts across the dark.

Caravaggio painted the Medusa on a convex wooden shield about 1597, for Cardinal del Monte, who gave it to Grand Duke Ferdinando I de' Medici in 1598. The head is often said to be a self-portrait. It is shown at the instant of decapitation, with no background, only the face and the scream.

In the Uffizi the shield hangs alone. The plate gives it a bearer, and puts her in the plate's own house of candles. The head on the shield is Caravaggio's. The bearer, the candelabras and the small wax drop are added.

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04 The sword lowered

1599 · BARBERINI

Set beside Judith Beheading Holofernes, about 1599. Oil on canvas, 145 × 195 cm, Gallerie Nazionali di Arte Antica, Palazzo Barberini, Rome. The beheading is not in this frame. Here the sword is lowered.

Judith Beheading Holofernes at Palazzo Barberini

A young woman stands in a crimson dress with an olive cloak over her shoulders, a sword held down at her side and her eyes lowered. Candles burn on a ledge at the left and one tall candle at the right, its wax running. A red drape hangs behind her, with a branch of laurel at the wall.

In the Barberini painting, which Caravaggio made about 1599 for the banker Ottavio Costa, Judith cuts off the head of Holofernes at the moment of the cut, her maidservant beside her with the bag. The canvas is 145 by 195 centimetres. The model for Judith is often said to be the courtesan Fillide Melandroni.

The plate takes the moment after the decision, not the cut. The sword is down, nothing is shown, and the quiet is the plate's own. The room, the cloak, the candles and the small wax drop on the sleeve are added. It does not copy the painting.

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05 The pool

1597–99 · BARBERINI

After Narcissus, about 1597–99. Oil on canvas, 110 × 92 cm, Gallerie Nazionali di Arte Antica, Palazzo Barberini, Rome. The kneeling youth and the reflection are Caravaggio's. The candle, the wax pool and the dust are added.

Narcissus at Palazzo Barberini

A young man in red and cream leans on one hand over a black pool, his knee bent, and looks at his own face looking up. Behind him two candles burn on a stone ledge. Gold dust floats on the water, and the reflection reaches down into the dark.

The Narcissus in the Barberini is 110 by 92 centimetres and is dated about 1597–99. Whether it is by Caravaggio is still debated, though most scholars now accept it. The picture is built on a symmetry: the youth and his reflection together make a ring, with the light on his shoulder and his knee.

The plate keeps the ring and puts a candle behind him, so the reflection is a second room. The water is a little thicker than water, like wax, and holds the dust. The candle and the wax mark at the waterline are added.

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06 The beam

1599–1600 · SAN LUIGI

After The Calling of Saint Matthew, 1599–1600. Oil on canvas, 322 × 340 cm, Contarelli Chapel, San Luigi dei Francesi, Rome. The table, the gesture and the beam are Caravaggio's. The candle, the dust and the wax mark are added.

Contarelli Chapel, San Luigi dei Francesi

Men in dark hats and dark coats sit around a table in a low room, counting. At the right a man in a red cloak stands in the doorway and points, and a beam of gold light crosses the room from above his hand, with dust turning in it. A single candle burns on the table.

The Calling of Saint Matthew is in the Contarelli Chapel of San Luigi dei Francesi in Rome, 322 by 340 centimetres, painted in 1599–1600. It was Caravaggio's first public commission, and it made his name. The beam of light from the window above the pointing figure falls on the faces at the table.

The plate keeps the table, the pointing hand and the beam, and adds the candle, so that two lights are competing. The dust, the candle and the small wax drop on the edge of the table are added.

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07 The supper

1601 · LONDON

After The Supper at Emmaus, 1601. Oil on canvas, 139 × 195 cm, National Gallery, London, NG172. The figures and the gestures are Caravaggio's. The candles, the curtain and the dust are added.

The Supper at Emmaus at the National Gallery

Three men and a standing figure sit at a table laid with bread, fruit and a white cloth, in a room hung with red curtains. At the centre a young man in red lifts his hand in blessing, and at the right an old man in a grey coat flings out both arms. Candles stand along the table, with gold dust settling on the bread.

The Supper at Emmaus was painted in 1601 for Ciriaco Mattei. It is 139 by 195 centimetres, and the National Gallery in London bought it in 1839. In the painting the two disciples recognise the risen Christ when he breaks the bread, and their arms are flung out at the moment of recognition.

The plate keeps the figures and the gestures, and puts the light on the table in candles, so the blessing is lit twice. The curtain and the candles are added. The small wax drop is at the edge of the cloth.

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08 The shroud

1602-03 · VATICAN

After The Entombment of Christ, 1602-03. Oil on canvas, 300 × 203 cm, Pinacoteca Vaticana, Vatican City. The group and the weight are Caravaggio's. The doorway, the candles and the dust are added.

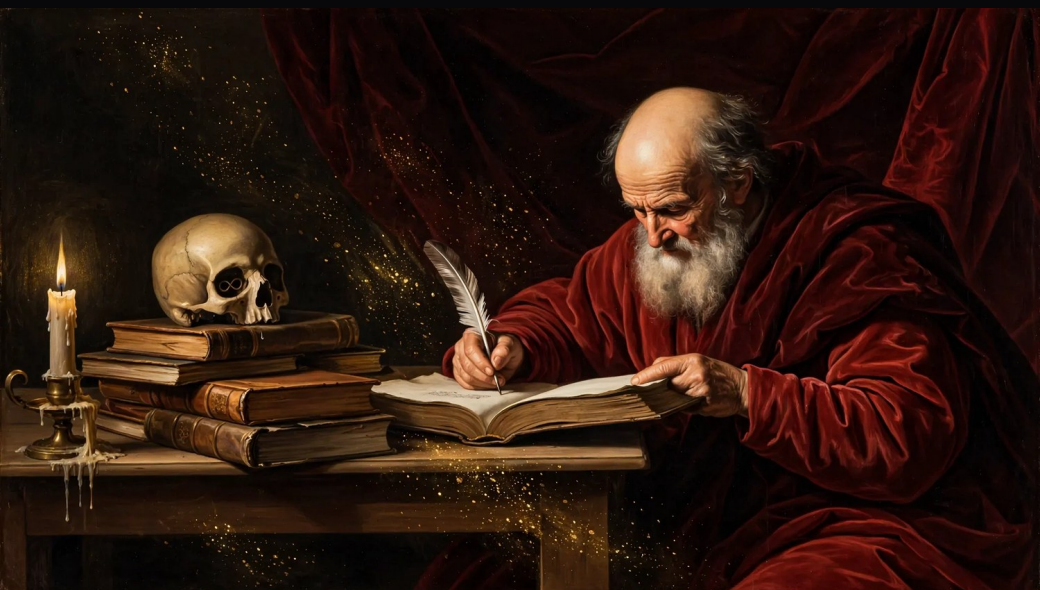
The Entombment of Christ in the Vatican Museums

Mourners carry a body wrapped in a crimson shroud down a stone step, two men bearing the weight and three women standing behind, heads covered in blue and brown. A doorway of heavy stone opens behind them into the dark. Candles burn on the ledges to the left and right, and gold dust drifts down.

Caravaggio painted the Entombment of Christ in 1602-03 for the Chiesa Nuova in Rome. It is 300 by 203 centimetres. It was taken to Paris in 1797 and returned in 1816, and it now hangs in the Vatican Pinacoteca. The body's hand and the carriers' effort are the heart of it: the weight of a dead man.

The plate keeps the carriers, the weight and the step, and turns the stone slab of the painting into a doorway. The candles, the doorway and the dust are added. The small wax drop is on the stone at the step's edge.

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09 The skull and the pen

1605–06 • BORGHESE

After Saint Jerome Writing, 1605–06. Oil on canvas, 112 × 157 cm, Galleria Borghese, Rome. The saint, the skull and the pen are Caravaggio's. The candle, the curtain and the dust are added.

Saint Jerome Writing (Galleria Borghese)

An old man with a white beard, in a crimson robe, writes in a large open book with a quill. On the desk in front of him stand a skull and a stack of books, and a candle burns at the left with its wax running down. A red drape hangs behind, and gold dust lies across the page.

Caravaggio painted Saint Jerome Writing about 1605–06. It is 112 by 157 centimetres. In the Borghese inventories it was attributed to Jusepe de Ribera from 1700 until 1893, and its authorship is still sometimes questioned. Jerome may be shown translating the Vulgate, with the skull beside him as a reminder.

The plate keeps the writer, the skull and the pen and adds a candle, so the page has its own light. The quill, the skull and the red robe are Caravaggio's. The candle, the dust and the small wax drop at the desk's edge are added.

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10 The vigil

1606 · LOUVRE

After Death of the Virgin, 1601–06. Oil on canvas, 369 × 245 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris. The Virgin, the mourners and the red drape are Caravaggio's. The candle and the dust are added.

Death of the Virgin at the Louvre

A woman lies on a bed in a dark room, her head back and her hands loose, in a blue gown with a crimson cover over her. Mourners crowd round her with their heads in their hands, in browns and greys. A great red drape hangs above. A single candle burns at the lower left, and gold dust drifts in the air.

Caravaggio painted the Death of the Virgin for Santa Maria della Scala in Trastevere, in Rome. The painting is 369 by 245 centimetres. The Carmelite friars who commissioned it rejected it, and on the advice of Rubens the Duke of Mantua bought it in 1607. It is in the Louvre now.

The plate keeps the mourners and the drape, and puts a candle in place of the halo. The candle and the dust are added. The small wax drop is on the floor at the bed's foot.

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11 David and the drop

1609–10 · BORGHESSE

Set beside David with the Head of Goliath, 1609–10. Oil on canvas, 125 × 101 cm, Galleria Borghese, Rome. A composite: the figures are after Caravaggio, the crowd and the large gold drop are added.

David with the Head of Goliath (Galleria Borghese)

A young man in a pale draped cloth holds up the head of Goliath by the hair at the right, with a candle-lit crowd of mourners in the dark room behind him. Above the table a large gold drop of wax in the shape of an infinity sign hangs dripping, over a few small gold coins and a cluster of burning candles.

In the Borghese painting Caravaggio put his own face on Goliath's head. The picture is 125 by 101 centimetres and is dated between 1605 and 1610, with the Getty and many scholars placing it in 1609–10, after his flight from Malta. The sword carries the letters H-AS OS, usually read as a Latin motto, humility kills pride.

This plate is a composite, and it says so. The crowd and the table are the plate's own. It is the one plate in which the edition's mark is large and not hidden.

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12 The prison yard

1608 · VALLETTA

Set beside The Beheading of Saint John the Baptist, 1608. Oil on canvas, 361 × 520 cm, Oratory, St John's Co-Cathedral, Valletta. The executioner is not in this frame. Here the yard is empty and the candle is lit.

St John's Co-Cathedral, Valletta

A stone prison yard under a barred window. Two women in black and white stand with their backs half turned and a grey-coated man stands near them, all looking at the ground. A single candle burns on a brass stand at the right, and red petals lie on the paving, one of them bent into the shape of an infinity sign.

Caravaggio painted the Beheading of Saint John the Baptist in 1608 for the Oratory of St John's Co-Cathedral in Valletta, after he was made a Knight of Malta. At 361 by 520 centimetres it is his largest painting, and the only one he signed, with his name written in the blood from the saint's neck.

The plate keeps the yard, the window and the watchers, and takes out the killing. The executioner and the saint are not in the frame. The candle, the petals and the small wax mark are added. What is left is what the others in the yard are doing after it.

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14 The wax, from behind

BACK COVER

Frame 14 of 14. Made for this edition. It is not after any single painting.

David with the Head of Goliath (Galleria Borghese)

A large gold drop of wax in the shape of an infinity sign hangs at the centre of a gilded border. Around it crowd the figures of the Entombment, the Death of the Virgin and the head of Goliath, in crimson and dark, with candles burning along the bottom edge. Gold dust is falling through the whole picture.

The front cover declares the mark over Bacchus, the boy with the basket and the Medusa shield, the three paintings of the 1590s. The back cover moves to the end: the Entombment, the Death of the Virgin and David, the paintings of 1602 to 1610. In the twelve plates the drop is small and hidden. Here it is large and declared.

The wax mark is this edition's own. It is not Caravaggio's, and it is not in any museum. It stands as a seal, and as the mark of the run of one hundred. Look at the picture first.

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Colophon

This edition, House of Candle, was made by Aestas Infinity in 2026. It is a book in the archive. It is not a chapter of any series.

Twelve plates and two covers, each at 16:9. The words sit under the picture. The front cover and the back cover are new pictures, each with a large drop of wax in the shape of an infinity sign. AI tools were used in making the covers and the plates; the methods stay private. The plates are new pictures made after, or beside, the paintings named under each one. They are not reproductions.

The file is a narrow page so it can be read on a phone without sliding sideways. A word in amber opens another plate, the painting in the museum, or a page of the archive. The line at the top of a page is the same kind of link, kept small. On a plate, the line under the text moves to the previous picture or the next.

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The paintings named here are in the Galleria Borghese and the Gallerie Nazionali di Arte Antica at Palazzo Barberini, Rome; the Uffizi, Florence; San Luigi dei Francesi, Rome; the National Gallery, London; the Vatican Museums; the Louvre, Paris; and St John's Co-Cathedral, Valletta. This book is a reading of those works. It is not a reproduction of them, and it does not take their place.

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Caravaggio

Aestas Infinity

HOUSE OF CANDLE · TWELVE PLATES · LTD 100

NUMBER

_____ / 100

YEAR

2026

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in the shape of an infinity sign.

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