



# PRESS RELEASE

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## THE FRICK COLLECTION

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### ***CAGNACCI’S “REPENTANT MAGDALENE” AN ITALIAN BAROQUE MASTERPIECE COMES TO THE FRICK THIS FALL***

October 25, 2016, through January 22, 2017



Guido Cagnacci (1601–1663), *The Repentant Magdalene*, ca. 1660–63, oil on canvas, 90 1/4 x 104 3/4 inches, Norton Simon Art Foundation, Pasadena, California

Guido Cagnacci was one of the most eccentric painters of seventeenth-century Italy, infamous for his unconventional art and lifestyle. His works, mostly religious in subject, are known for their unabashed, often unsettling eroticism, and his biography is no less intriguing. Though his pictorial style was influenced by some of the most important Italian painters of the time—the Carracci, Guercino, and Guido Reni—Cagnacci developed an individual and immediately recognizable artistic language. This October, the Frick will present Cagnacci’s ambitious *Repentant Magdalene*, considered a masterpiece of seventeenth-century Italian art, and a work that has not been seen outside California since its acquisition by the Norton Simon Museum almost thirty-

five years ago. A testament to Cagnacci’s genius, this extraordinary painting—the latest in a series of loans to the Frick from the Norton Simon Museum, in Pasadena—will introduce New York audiences to this largely forgotten artist.

*Cagnacci’s “Repentant Magdalene”*: An Italian Baroque Masterpiece from the Norton Simon Museum was organized by Xavier F. Salomon, Peter Jay Sharp Chief Curator, The Frick Collection. Principal funding for the exhibition is generously provided by the Robert H. Smith Family Foundation. Major support for the exhibition and

the accompanying book, *The Art of Guido Cagnacci*, is provided by Fabrizio Moretti, with additional support from Mr. and Mrs. Michael J. Horvitz, Ayasha Bulchandani, and Mark Fisch and Rachel Davidson.

Comments Salomon, “It is exciting to host at the Frick the first exhibition in the United States dedicated to Guido Cagnacci. His paintings are among the most astonishing artworks that were produced in seventeenth-century Italy. The *Repentant Magdalene* is no doubt Cagnacci’s absolute masterpiece, and it will be an honor to present Cagnacci and his work to a New York and international audience.”

## **CAGNACCI’S UNCONVENTIONAL LIFE AND DISTINCTIVE STYLE**

Most of Cagnacci’s early life was spent in Romagna, a region in northeastern Italy between the Apennine Mountains and the Adriatic Sea. He was born in 1601, in the small village of Santarcangelo di Romagna and probably first trained as a painter there. By 1618 he was studying in Bologna, and in the early 1620s is documented living in Rome. His artistic training took place under Ludovico Carracci and Guercino, two of the most important painters active in Bologna and Rome at the time. By the mid-1620s Cagnacci was back in Romagna, where he produced idiosyncratic pictures for religious and aristocratic patrons. He worked mainly in the principal cities of the region (Rimini, Forlì, and Faenza), but also executed commissions for small towns in the area, such as Montegridolfo, Saludecio, and his birthplace of Santarcangelo. For almost ten years, in the 1650s, Cagnacci was based in Venice, before moving in 1658 to Vienna, the imperial capital, where he died five years later.

Cagnacci was infamous in his day for his unconventional lifestyle, and most of the surviving documents that enable us to reconstruct his biography are legal and criminal records. In 1628, he unlawfully eloped with Teodora Arianna Stivivi, an aristocratic widow, but avoided arrest by abandoning her and fleeing town. Later, he was often rumored to be living illegally with attractive young women, who were disguised as male apprentices. He succeeded in convincing one woman to bequeath him all of her property, and, on occasion, he was known to travel from city to city under a false name. In Venice, he seemed to have tried to create a new identity for himself, presumably to sever his romantic and legal entanglements in Romagna.

Cagnacci’s paintings, mostly religious in subject, are known to scholars for their unashamed, often unsettling, eroticism. Even though his pictorial style was influenced by some of the greatest Italian Baroque painters—the Carracci, Guercino, and Guido Reni—his figurative language always remained individual and highly recognizable. Especially after the late 1630s, he developed a particularly distinctive style, partly based on Reni’s languid late works. The unconventionality of his paintings meant that during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries he was almost entirely forgotten, if not in his native area. The rediscovery of Cagnacci’s oeuvre took place in Italy in the 1950s, when two exhibitions—in Rimini, in 1952, and in Bologna, in 1959—introduced him to modern Italian art historians and writers. He remained little known outside of Italy, however, and the only exhibitions dedicated to him took place in Rimini, in 1993, and in Forlì, in 2008.

Only four of the artist's works, including the *Repentant Magdalene*, are on view in American institutions. The first work by Cagnacci to reach the United States, *David with the Head of Goliath*, was acquired in 1962 by the Columbia Museum of Art in South Carolina, as part of the bequest of Samuel H. Kress. Interestingly, Kress bought the canvas as the work of Bernardo Strozzi, in 1955, and it was only in 1959 that it was attributed to Cagnacci. Another version of *David with the Head of Goliath* was purchased by the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles in 2008, and, just this year, The Metropolitan Museum of Art purchased the fourth Cagnacci in the United States, *Cleopatra*. The *Repentant Magdalene* was acquired by Norton Simon in 1982 and remains to this day one of the painter's most significant works in any museum in the world.

## THE REPENTANT MAGDALENE

The *Repentant Magdalene* is Cagnacci's most ambitious canvas and is rightly considered one of his most important works. Highly theatrical in composition, the painting is based on contemporary literary sources and on religious plays inspired by biblical texts. The scene is set in a large room, lit from a window on the left and from a door to the right; the columns and balustrade of the balcony beyond denote the house as an aristocratic residence. A terracotta pot on the balustrade holds a carnation plant, the flowers of which have yet to blossom. The room is richly decorated, with a tiled floor, an Eastern carpet, and three red and gold damask cushions.



*The Repentant Magdalene* (detail), ca. 1660–63, oil on canvas, 90 1/4 x 104 3/4 inches, Norton Simon Art Foundation, Pasadena, California



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The event depicted in this elegant space is an episode from the life of Mary Magdalene, the courtesan who gives up her sinful life and converts to Christianity, following her encounter with Christ in the temple. At the center of the composition, a repentant Mary is shown on the floor, having apparently discarded her luxurious clothes and jewels. Her face is reddened by remorse, and her body is barely covered by a white sheet. Her cast-off belongings are strewn on the floor around her, carefully “arranged” by Cagnacci into a beautiful still life. Martha, the Magdalene's sister, has found her in this state. Simply dressed, Martha sits on a cushion, calming Mary. Behind them, two servants are leaving the room after having witnessed their mistress' emotional scene. Cagnacci has included two allegorical figures to the left. A standing angel, its hair blown by the same divine wind that ruffles its wings, banishes a levitating devil, complete with horns and tail, which lurches toward the

window as he flees the room. The combatant figures represent Virtue and Vice as they battle for Mary's soul at the moment she chooses to embrace her virtuous new Christian life.

The *Repentant Magdalene* was probably painted in the early 1660s in Vienna for Emperor Leopold I. Sometime in 1660–61, Cagnacci wrote to Francesco Gionima, his pupil and assistant in Venice, explaining that it was no longer possible for him to visit that spring, as he had planned: "I cannot come [to Venice] anymore after Easter, because His Imperial Majesty has asked that I promise to make him a painting of the repentant Saint Mary Magdalene, with four full-length figures."

One of the most common criticisms of Cagnacci within Venetian artistic circles was that he was capable of painting only individual figures, half-length. (While in Venice and Vienna he had, in fact, produced a large number of such paintings, including *Cleopatra*, now in the Pinacoteca di Brera in Milan, one of his best-known works in Italy.) Several of Cagnacci's contemporaries, the painter Pietro Liberi and art critic Marco Boschini, among others, had viciously condemned his work, and the artist's move to Vienna may have been in response to the hostile reception of his



*The Repentant Magdalene* (detail), ca. 1660–63, oil on canvas, 90 1/4 x 104 3/4 inches, Norton Simon Art Foundation, Pasadena, California

production in Venice. Cagnacci, in his letter to Gionima, described his plans for the full-length figures he intended to include in the *Repentant Magdalene*, remarking with bitter sarcasm "and because I cannot paint feet, it would be better if Cavalier Liberi could come and paint them himself." This commission from the Emperor was clearly an important opportunity for Cagnacci to prove himself. With his *Repentant Magdalene*, Cagnacci not only demonstrated that he could paint legs and feet (and shoes), but he produced a remarkable masterpiece. It cannot be a coincidence that the painter chose to sign this painting, in the bottom right corner, as GVIDVS CAGNACCIVS INVENTOR, underscoring the compositional ambition of the work.

Regrettably, there are no surviving accounts describing how his contemporaries responded to this fantastic painting. Although the canvas had been commissioned in Vienna by Emperor Leopold I, by 1665 it was in Italy, in the collection of Carlo II Gonzaga, Duke of Mantua, at his villa La Favorita, outside Mantua. The ducal family was closely related to the emperor: Carlo II was married to Leopold's cousin, Isabella Clara of Austria, and the emperor's stepmother was Eleonora Gonzaga, Carlo's sister. The *Repentant Magdalene* may have been a diplomatic gift for the Duke of Mantua or may have been acquired by him from Leopold I. In 1711, it was first documented in the possession of the Bentinck family in England, originally at Bulstrode House, Buckinghamshire, and then at Welbeck Abbey, in Nottinghamshire. It remained at Welbeck until 1981, when Lady Anne Bentinck put the canvas up for auction at Christie's in London.

Cagnacci died in Vienna in 1663. In a letter written that same year, Monsignor Giacomo Villani of Rimini praised Cagnacci's artistic accomplishments in Rimini and melancholically concluded that he had been "a painter of good talent, but of ill-fated fortune." Cagnacci left no followers or pupils to continue and promote his distinctive style, and this is probably one of the reasons that his work was consigned to the virtual obscurity it languished in until fairly recently. In the catalogue of the 1952 exhibition, the Italian art historian Cesare Gnudi wrote about two large canvases that Cagnacci had painted in 1642–44 for the Cathedral of Forlì. His lyrical description of these works could apply to most of Cagnacci's paintings, including the *Repentant Magdalene*: "[they possess] a sensuous beauty, an exuberant life that expands into a spectacular vision, a magnificent and joyful ballet; a world that delights itself in an enchanted game of brilliant colors, of dazzling lights, of sounds, and at the same time discovers a reality which is closer and more earthly, a new, much abbreviated, relationship with nature: all of these, we have seen, are typical seventeenth-century notes, but expressed in such singular form that it can be easily said that they add a new accent to the history of Italian painting."

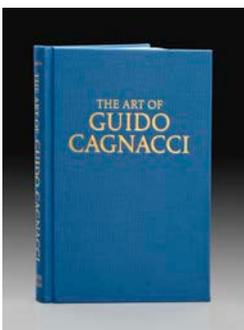


*The Repentant Magdalene* (detail), ca. 1660–63, oil on canvas, 90 1/4 x 104 3/4 inches, Norton Simon Art Foundation, Pasadena, California

Cagnacci's main achievement rests in his curious and somewhat inexplicable amalgamation of different styles, which resulted in a very specific and recognizable artistic language. Too often our knowledge of Italian seventeenth-century painters is limited to the artists who worked in large and significant cities, including Rome, Bologna, and Naples. A number of important artists, however, were active in what have traditionally been considered more provincial centers, like Romagna. Guido Cagnacci is one such example. It is only by becoming familiar with the larger landscape

of Italian Baroque art that we can reach a more balanced and, ultimately, more interesting view of the art of the period. The loan of the *Repentant Magdalene* to The Frick Collection offers a perfect opportunity to do so.

## PUBLICATION



*The Art of Guido Cagnacci* is the first book in English devoted to the artist in nearly thirty years. Written by Xavier F. Salomon and published by Scala Arts & Heritage Publishers, it examines Cagnacci's life and work, from his early religious paintings to the later canvases showing ancient heroines and allegorical and biblical figures, often in defiantly sensual attitudes. It is available in the Museum Shop or can be ordered through the Frick's Web site ([frick.org](http://frick.org)) or by phone at 212.547.6848. Hardcover (\$24.95, \$22.46 member price), 128 pages, 54 color illustrations, 6 x 9 inches.

# PROGRAMS

## LECTURE

Lectures are free, and seating is on a first-come, first-served basis. Selected lectures are webcast live and archived for future viewing on our Web site. Please visit [frick.org/live](http://frick.org/live) for details.

### Travels with Cagnacci

Wednesday, November 30, 6:00 p.m.

Xavier F. Salomon, Peter Jay Sharp Chief Curator, The Frick Collection

Guido Cagnacci, whose *Repentant Magdalene* is the focus of the special exhibition, was one of the most eccentric painters of seventeenth-century Italy. This lecture tracks his turbulent life and career by following his footsteps from his native Romagna to Venice and finally to Vienna. While researching the exhibition, curator Xavier F. Salomon visited the cities where the painter lived and worked, and his talk provides a window into the artist's fascinating world.

## INTERACT

Social:    /FrickCollection

#CagnaccisMagdalene

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## BASIC INFORMATION

**General Information Phone:** 212.288.0700

**Web site:** [www.frick.org](http://www.frick.org)

**Building project:** [www.frickfuture.org](http://www.frickfuture.org)

**E-mail:** [info@frick.org](mailto:info@frick.org)

**App:** [frick.org/app](http://frick.org/app)

**Where:** 1 East 70th Street, near Fifth Avenue

**Museum Hours:** open six days a week: 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. on Tuesdays through Saturdays; 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on Sundays. Closed Mondays, New Year's Day, Independence Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas Day. Limited hours (11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.) on Lincoln's Birthday, Election Day, and Veterans Day

**Admission:** \$22; senior citizens \$17; students \$12; "pay what you wish" on Sundays from 11 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

**First Fridays:** museum admission and gallery programs are free from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. on the first Friday evening of the month (except January)

**PLEASE NOTE TO YOUR READERS:** Children under ten are not admitted to the Collection

**Subway:** #6 local (on Lexington Avenue) to 68th Street station; Bus: M1, M2, M3, and M4 southbound on Fifth Avenue to 72nd Street and northbound on Madison Avenue to 70th Street

**Tour Information:** included in the price of admission is an Acoustiguide Audio Tour of the permanent collection. The tour is offered in six languages: English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, and Spanish.

**Shop:** the shop is open the same days as the Museum, closing fifteen minutes before the institution.

**Group Visits:** Please call 212.288.0700 for details and to make reservations.

**Public Programs:** A calendar of events is published regularly and is available upon request.

### # 291, September 20, 2016

For further press information, please contact Alexis Light, Senior Manager of Media Relations & Marketing; Phone: 212.547.0710; E-mail: [mediarelations@frick.org](mailto:mediarelations@frick.org)