

# Western Civilization

Art Discussion, Oct. 31, 2011

Group 1

# **CATHOLIC BAROQUE**

# Bernini, *The Ecstasy of St. Teresa*.

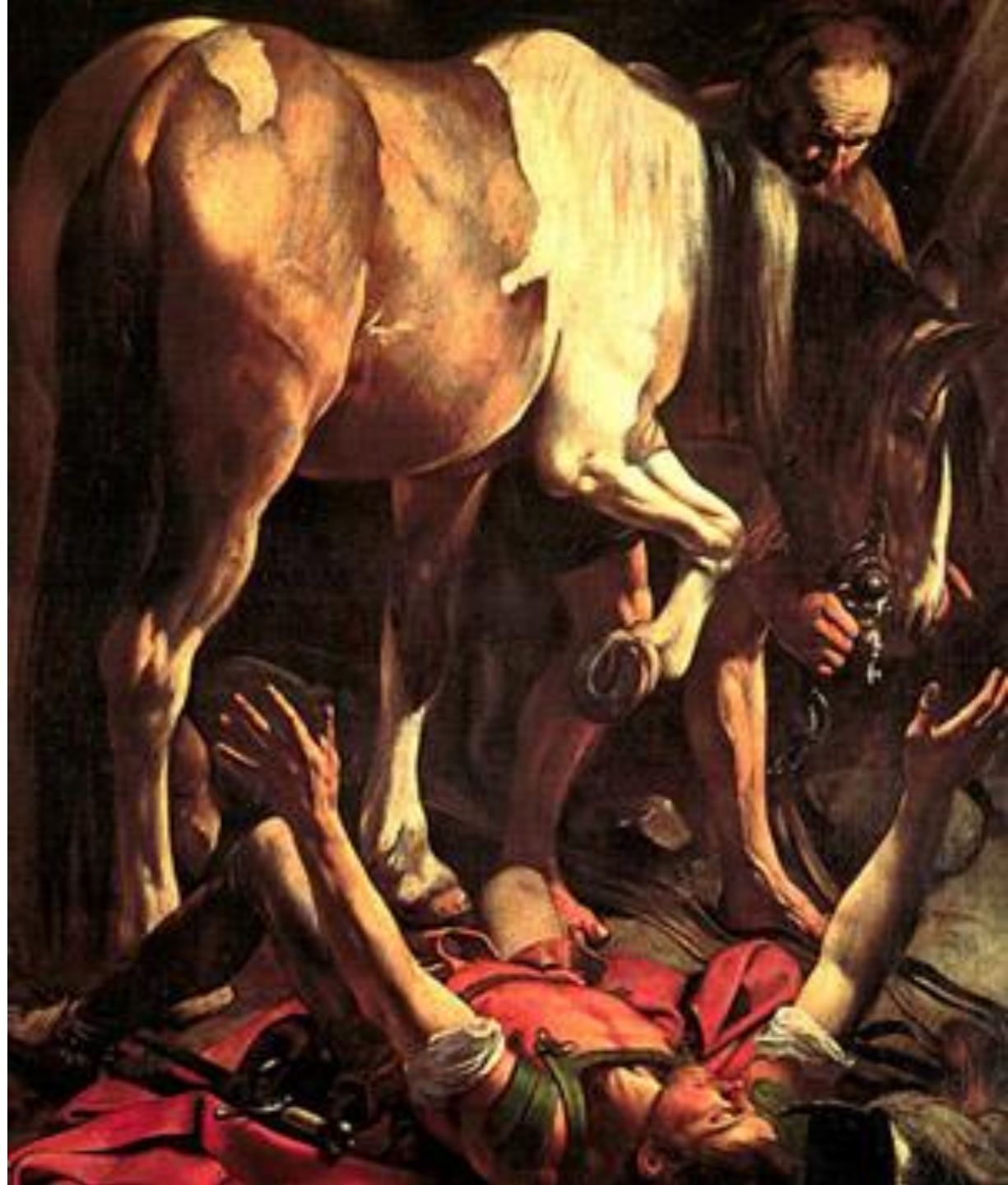
1645-52

- What is happening to St. Teresa in this sculpture?
- What is Teresa's emotional response? How would you describe the expression on her face?
- How would you describe the angel's expression?
- Beyond the facial expressions, what techniques enhance the impact of this sculpture?



# Caravaggio, *The Conversion on the Way to Damascus*. 1601.

- Describe what has happened to Paul (Saul of Tarsus) in this painting. What story is it telling? How is it similar to/different from Teresa's experience?
- How would you describe Paul's physical position? Why is it significant?
- What impact does the position and size of the horse have on the image?
- What is the significance of Caravaggio's use of light here?



# **NORTHERN BAROQUE**

# Rembrandt, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*. c. 1669.

- What story does this painting depict, and what specific moment in the story? Why did Rembrandt choose this particular moment?
- Comment on the father's expression and gesture, the son's position, and both of their clothes.
- How is the feeling and technique of this Northern Baroque painting similar to/different from the Catholic Baroque examples?





# Vermeer, *Woman Holding a Balance*. 1662-63.

- Here is another Northern Baroque painting, this one by Vermeer. How is its mood similar to the Rembrandt?
- Is this a religious painting? Consider the significance of the balance, and of the image of the Last Judgment in the background.
- If it is religious, how is it different from Rembrandt's religious painting?



# Views of Cities

- Following are two paintings of cities, by El Greco and Vermeer, from the later 16<sup>th</sup> and mid-17<sup>th</sup> centuries, respectively. (El Greco paints in the Mannerist style, Vermeer in the Northern Baroque style.) What are some differences and similarities between these urban views? How is each scene structured? Which view seems more modern? Why?

# El Greco, *View of Toledo*. 1597



# Vermeer, *View of Delft*. 1658.



# **ROMANTICISM & LANDSCAPE**

# John Constable, *Wivenhoe Park, Essex*. 1816.

- What are the major features of the English estate as portrayed in this painting?
- Does nature or civilization predominate in this scene? Explain.
- What impact does light and shadow have on the scene?





# John Constable, *The Hay-Wain*. 1821

- How does this give us a different image of the English landscape than the previous image?
- What is happening here? What are the main features of the scene? What catches your eye? (Note: In the distant meadow, haymakers are at work.)
- What messages does this painting send about rural life in England?
- Why would well-to-do English people want to look at a scene like this?



# Thomas Cole, *The Oxbow*. 1836.

- Here is an American Romantic landscape. How does it differ from the English examples?
- How is the painting structured, or divided? Does nature or civilization predominate? (Hint: The title refers to the shape of the river and also to the object, an oxbow. What does an oxbow do?)
- Cole's umbrella is on the edge of the hill, and Cole himself (very tiny) is visible to the left. How does Cole position himself within this scene?



# Caspar David Friedrich, *Wanderer above the Mists*. c. 1818.

- This German painting is an icon of Romanticism. How does it capture the spirit of Romanticism?
- What is the relationship between the human figure and nature here? What kind of person is depicted? Does nature or civilization predominate?



# **ROMANTICISM & HISTORY**



Francisco Goya. *The Third of May, 1808: The Execution of the Defenders of Madrid.*

1814

- This painting depicts the execution of Spanish citizens who rebelled against the occupying French army. With whom does Goya sympathize? How do we know? What political statement is the painting making?
- How does Goya achieve emotional power through the composition: the posture/gestures of the “defenders” and the army, use of light and dark, etc.



# J. M. W. Turner. *The Slave Ship*. 1840.

- This painting depicts the practice of slave-traders throwing overboard diseased/malnourished slaves in order to collect insurance money.
- What is distinctive about Turner's painting style?
- How does Turner portray nature here, and how does nature relate to the actions of the slave-traders? Does nature or civilization predominate?
- What kind of political statement is this painting making?

