COURSE DESCRIPTION:
This course explores the impact of one of the best known artists of all time, Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1573-1610), and his contemporaries in Baroque Italy. A pop icon today who has inspired an entire industry of scholarship, novels, and a feature film, this tormented, sensual, yet deeply pious artist is the only Italian Baroque painter to remain a household name. We will explore Caravaggio's intense naturalism and populist piety and the controversies caused by both, his relationship with Catholic devotions and religious orders, his sense of drama and supernatural light, and the role of his personality in works of art. We will consider how Baroque Italians interpreted religious paintings; how they viewed the saints and sinners depicted in them; and the dynamics of art commissions.

This course will also look at the most prominent woman painter of the Baroque, an equally controversial figure named Artemisia Gentileschi, who has occupied a comparable place in the popular imagination. An artist who was deeply influenced by Caravaggio but who developed her own unique style, Artemisia has been the subject of an impressive amount of recent scholarship, a novel, a Broadway play, and a feature film. Both Caravaggio and Artemisia combine the sensual and the sacred and have larger-than-life biographies. One of the goals of this course is to look at the ways in which these artists’ personalities have been projected onto their work by scholars, essayists, novelists, and filmmakers.

Another major purpose of this course is to explore the relationship between religion and art in the age of Caravaggio. We will look at how Italians in that era interpreted religious paintings; how they viewed the saints and sinners depicted in them; and we will consider the spiritual and social role played by these figures and by religious art in the early Baroque period. For this we will look not just at Caravaggio but by other artists active during his lifetime and afterwards.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS & FORMAT:
A detailed list of readings and requirements will be available during the first class. Each class will be structured as a seminar discussion. Regular and attentive attendance is expected. Assignments will include presentations and a final research paper.