

HISTORY IN ART

Georges de la Tour (1593–1652)

9 November 2022

- 1593 – Georges de la Tour is born near Metz in what was an independent prince-bishopric within the Holy Roman Empire until 1552, when it was annexed by France. His father is a baker and his mother may have had some aristocratic ancestors. (Little is known of his early life but it seems he must have had some artistic training from a fairly young age, and possibly was apprenticed to the successful artist Jacques Bellange in Nancy, the capital of Lorraine.)
 - 1617 – He marries Diane Le Nerf, herself part of the minor nobility, and three years later he sets up a studio in his wife’s home town, Lunéville, one of the most important towns in Lorraine. His early style shows the influence of the great painter of the Italian Baroque, Caravaggio. (Possibly he travelled to Italy and saw his works, or maybe he saw work by other artists influenced directly by Caravaggio in France or the Netherlands.) Like Caravaggio, de la Tour paints many indoor scenes lit by candlelight, with sharp contrasts between darkness and light (*chiaroscuro*).
 - 1638 – De la Tour is appointed “painter to the king” – that is the King of France, who has influence in Lorraine, and France will soon occupy the duchy (from 1841). He also receives patronage from the dukes of Lorraine, but their rule is compromised by French control and Charles IV, the duke in most of Georges de la Tour’s lifetime, is forced into exile for a few years. Mostly his income comes from commissions from the rich businessmen of the area. He becomes quite rich himself from these commissions.
 - c.1642 – Towards the end of his life, de la Tour’s painting turns increasingly to religious works, although his style remains fairly constant, with the same Caravaggesque touches now applied to biblical images or paintings of the saints.
 - 1652 – Georges de la Tour dies aged 58 in Lunéville.
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