

The Art of Gambling



The Cardsharps, 1594
Oil on Canvas
0,94 m. x 1,31 m.

Michelangelo Merisi is better known as Caravaggio, born in 1573 in Caravaggio in the province of Bergamo in Italy, and died in 1610. The painting "The Cardsharps" is currently at the Kimble Art Museum, Ft. Worth, Texas (USA).

Beginning his painting career in Milan where he first studied art, Caravaggio remained there until about age 20, when he left to seek work in Rome. Times were difficult at first, and to survive he often worked as an assistant to painters of little repute. His first paintings were primarily still lifes, during a time when the technique was just becoming accepted as an art form in Italy. Later, when he was commissioned to paint "The Calling" and "The Martyrdom of St. Mathew", Caravaggio initiated his own artistic revolution, which introduced his style of intense and dramatic realism. His paintings have been described as "strictly life-like", incorporating strong contrasts of light and shade. His unique style drew many followers who emulated his work.

Caravaggio apparently enjoyed various aspects of gambling. Later in his life, he was involved in an altercation in which he killed a man over an unpaid gambling debt. The title of this work describes its focus. Card cheaters have long been known as "sharps". The boy on the right will choose which of his "hold outs" to use after receiving a signal, known as an "office", from his accomplice.

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