
THE  TIMES

Painting stolen by mafia is reborn



Adam Lowe re-created Caravaggio's masterpiece using old photos and new scanning techniques Josy Pereira

Tom Kington

Published at 12:01AM, December 11 2015

A 17th-century Caravaggio masterpiece stolen in Sicily by the mafia in 1969 and never seen again has been re-created using scanning techniques developed by a British expert and honed in a pharaoh's tomb.

A replica of Caravaggio's *Nativity with St Francis and St Lawrence* will be unveiled by the Italian president next week in Palermo, where it has been placed in the same frame over the altar in the same chapel where the original hung for four centuries.

Adam Lowe, the artist and restorer who re-created the nine foot by six foot depiction of the birth of Christ said: "It was beautiful to watch the emotional reaction of people in Palermo when we hung the painting."

Caravaggio's painting was commissioned for the Oratory of San Lorenzo and remained there until 1969, when it was cut from its frame.

The Sicilian mafia was blamed for the theft of the £13 million painting, which is arguably the world's most famous unrecovered work.

One mob turncoat claimed that it was so badly damaged that the man who ordered the theft sobbed when he saw it. Others have said it was hidden at a farm, where rats and pigs chewed it to pieces, or that it was buried in a chest full of heroin.

Mr Lowe has scanned other Caravaggios and re-created the tomb of Tutankhamun in Egypt after it was damaged by overexposure to tourists.

"The challenge with the *Nativity* was we did not have the original," said Mr Lowe, who had a 1967 four by five inch colour photo and some older black-and-white shots.

Mr Lowe and his team created an image at his Madrid studio and retouched it — digitally and using brushstrokes — by referring to "staggering" high-resolution data from scans of other Caravaggio works. The final version used the same canvas, primer and varnish as the original.