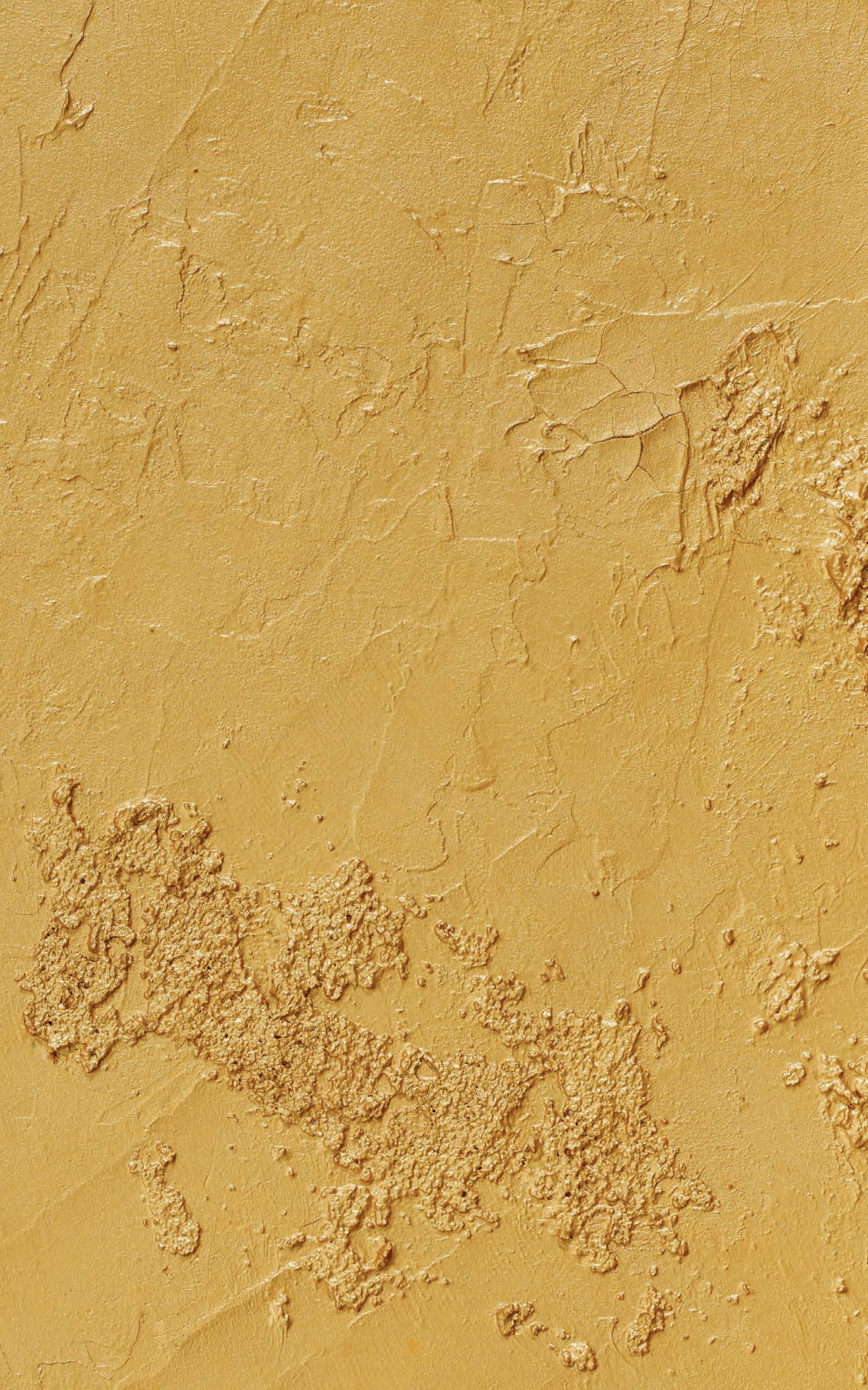




humanity: a comparison between
darkness and gold

yu hong's work in dialogue with
caravaggio's *seven acts of mercy*

**Humanity: a Comparison between
Darkness and Gold**

Yu Hong's Work in Dialogue with
Caravaggio's *Seven Acts of Mercy*

**Naples, Church of the Pio Monte
della Misericordia**
October 10, 2026 – January 10, 2027

Exhibition and catalogue by
Mario Codognato
Loredana Gazzara



Superintendent

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Alberto Sifola di San Martino

Exhibition Design Project

Alberto Sifola di San Martino,
Massimo Naviglio con Francesca
Bertagnin e Ginevra Naviglio

Critical Essays by
Loredana Gazzara

Catalogue Translation by
Stefano Campilongo

Organizing Secretariat
Roberta Ratti
with Sara Lucia Caccavale

Opening
Maurizio Burale
with Laura Palmiero
and Anna De Vincenzo

Educational Departement
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Communications and Press
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Catalogue
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Summary

- 7 Introduction
Fabrizia Paternò di San Nicola
- 8 Presentation
Alberto Sifola di San Martino
- 11 Compare and Contrast
Mario Codognato
- 13 Witness to Falling
Alexandra Munroe
- 33 Critical Essays
Loredana Gazzara



Introduction

Fabrizia Paternò di San Nicola

Superintendent

Pio Monte della Misericordia

Several years ago, a meticulous and expert visitor, accompanied by an equally competent guide from our city, made a must-see stop at our site to admire the masterpiece on the high altar of our church. Following that visit, several years later, the visitor, the owner of the extraordinary work we are exhibiting today in the church, turned that initial enthusiasm into action by donating the work to the Pio Monte della Misericordia.

Our benefactor, who by his express will wishes to remain anonymous, chose to add to our collection of contemporary art a work of monumental dimensions and extraordinary artistic and symbolic value for this institution.

We are delighted that this work, *Make a Wish*, strongly inspired by Caravaggio's masterpiece *Seven Acts of Mercy*, which is widely venerated by the general public, is to become part of our permanent collection of contemporary art. This work, too, explores the condition of human fragility and its spiritual yearning, which lie at the heart of the actions of this institution; for over four hundred years, the Pio Monte della Misericordia has welcomed and supported people in their needs and weaknesses, seeking to provide them with answers and opportunities. I am therefore certain that this powerful work will strongly represent the message of our organisation, joining Caravaggio's 'manifesto' and the other six seventeenth-century masterpieces, as well as the entire collection of the Quadreria, which, in various ways, tells the story of the generosity of the many people who have chosen to support the charitable activities of the Pio Monte.

Presentation

Alberto Sifola di San Martino

Governor of the artistic and archival movable heritage

Pio Monte della Misericordia

Naples, 1607. Beijing, 2026. Four centuries and 9,000 kilometres are not enough to sever a thread: the one that links the human pity depicted by Caravaggio to Yu Hong's suspended figures. This is the heart of the project that this exhibition explores — the encounter, in the church of the Pio Monte della Misericordia, between the Chinese artist's *Make a Wish* and the *Seven Acts of Mercy*, the Lombard master's absolute masterpiece. Two perspectives, extremely distant in time, which, surprisingly, turn out to be close.

It has been a great pleasure to support this project, curating the set-up in the church of the Pio Monte della Misericordia, whilst reflecting on Caravaggio's influence, which transcends space and time, ideally uniting seventeenth-century Naples with contemporary Asia.

Looking back on these years spent serving an ancient and important institution such as the Pio Monte della Misericordia, in my capacity as Governor responsible for movable property, art and archives, I feel sincere gratitude for having been able to form part of this centuries-old institution and for having helped to transmit its mission, which remains as vibrant and relevant as ever. I hope that my contribution has served as a small building block in an organisation far greater than ourselves, and one so precious to the city of Naples.

The exhibition layout is designed so that, upon entering the octagonal church of the Pio Monte della Misericordia, visitors can immediately compare the two works: The Caravaggio stands undisturbed and unchanged on the altar, whilst Yu Hong's work is situated by the pilaster that marks the boundary of the adjacent chapel. As the church has a central plan, the exhibition route naturally creates a coexistence between the ancient and the modern.

Yu Hong's work, mounted on a lightweight, movable and reversible black-lacquered wooden support, establishes an immediate comparison with Caravaggio's masterpiece: the gold background of the contemporary altarpiece is countered by the nocturnal darkness of the seventeenth century, two opposing languages — light and shadow — used to depict the same humanity. The descending figures in Yu Hong's work explicitly echo Caravaggio's Virgin supported by angels, making the compositional reference immediately apparent to anyone viewing the works.

Enriching the exhibition is the triptych *Death Can't Be Known until One Knows Life*, displayed at the centre of the church opposite the floor medallion of the octagonal plan, visible from all angles; the work, mounted on a parallelepiped with square base, has become part of the permanent collection, in the contemporary section, following the artist's donation on the occasion of the eighth edition of "Sette Opere *per* la Misericordia", when it was first exhibited in the church alongside works by artist of different background and sensibilities: Antony Gormley, Holly Herndon e Mat Dryhurst, Max Renkel, David Salle, Marco Tirelli e Lee Ufan.

The painter Yu Hong focuses her artistic exploration on the exposed body and on the experience of living and dying, endowing the tension of the bodies, painted against a golden

background, with a powerful symbolic significance that evokes both ancient iconographic tradition and the harshness of contemporary life, in a direct confrontation with the corporeal truth so dear to Merisi.

The exhibition is completed by two preparatory sketches for the works, displayed in frames with black passe-partout to highlight the gold of the background, and positioned symmetrically on the pilasters of the side chapels.

Placing a contemporary work into this sacred space renews the Pio Monte della Misericordia's original mission: to ensure that Mercy remains an ever-present theme, not relegated to a distant past. Expressed through an extreme interplay of light and shadow, this theme has remained, for over four centuries, the iconographic and spiritual heart of the building, a symbol of our institution.

Sincere thanks go to friend and architect Massimo Naviglio, with whom we devised the exhibition design, in collaboration with the young architects Francesca Bertagnin and Ginevra Naviglio, and to the curators Mario Codognato and Loredana Gazzara, for the commitment and perseverance with which they have carried this project forward.

Finally, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to our donors and benefactors for the constant generosity with which they help us to pursue the historic mission of this organisation, enriching our museum with works of great significance. At the end of the exhibition in the church, the donated work *Make a Wish* will become part of the collection in our contemporary art section. Whilst respecting the donor's wish to remain anonymous, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to him for his sensitivity and invaluable support offered to this institution, which continues to tell its history through the expressive language of contemporary artists, just like Caravaggio did in the past.