

Caravaggio: The Complete Works by Sebastian Schütze

TASCHEN, £100

It may be no accident that Caravaggio is a painter who fascinates the modern age. David Hockney has suggested that he 'invented Hollywood lighting', and it is true that this book is full of arresting close-ups of 17th-century faces caught as if by a spotlight against a backdrop darker than in any film noir.

Although the sensational aspects of his career – involving assault, murder, and escape from prison on Malta – are familiar, in other ways Caravaggio is an artist about whom we know surprisingly little. Almost his only personal statements are a few ambiguous words extracted from him in the witness box at various trials. The thorough and scholarly text and catalogue attempt to put Caravaggio in context. However, the main attraction of this book is the sumptuous quality of the illustrations. Reading it, however, is a little like resting a paving slab on one's knees.