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Simon Schama's Power Of Art

BBC2, 9pm

'Nobody before Bernini had made sculpture so carnal. In his nimble hands, marble would flutter and stream, quiver and sweat.' So says an exuberant Simon Schama as he stands before *The Ecstasy Of St Theresa* (above) in the church of Santa Maria della Vittoria in Rome.

In a vision, Theresa sees an angel thrusting a golden spear into her heart, penetrating the flesh. As the camera lovingly lingers and caresses her, Schama again makes art and its personal and historic context come to life. Pain meets pleasure in this dynamic sculpture, which he calls a 'visualisation of pure bliss'.

He also looks at Bernini's all-action sculpture of *Apollo and Daphne*, and at the bust he made of his beloved Costanza, her blouse

provocatively open at the top, which he calls 'perhaps the single sexiest invitation in all European sculpture'.

The dramatisations seem less intrusive than in last week's programme about Caravaggio, but the best parts still feature the fluent Schama himself.

The works of art he focuses on in this series all came about in a moment of crisis. In this case, Bernini had fallen from grace. At one time he had virtually monopolised papal commissions in Rome, but then came his ambitious design for two huge belltowers to go either side of the dome of St Peter's. Only one was built and that was soon demolished.

To come back from that ignominy he needed a miracle – and this piece of sculpture was that. ★★★★★