

The Portraits of El Greco

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Abstract

This paper concentrates on the portraits of Dominicos Theotocopoulos, widely known as El Greco. An examination of his early studies in Crete, the process of icon making and his work in Italy provide a framework for the later paintings he produced in Spain. Initially, Byzantine icon-making and Western traditions of painting were combined in creating his first style of painting, which was the base of his art even during the last stages of his life when his paintings changed dramatically. European traditions of portraiture are, therefore, examined as quite important, since they created the guidelines for both patrons and artists in most artistic European centres. They are thus, analysed in order to establish the various influences El Greco drew from in order to create his own, distinctive style. El Greco's secular and religious portraits are looked upon in relation to the rest of his work as well as the creations of other Italian and Spanish artists of the time. His portrayal of saints in comparison to his portrayal of people he was acquainted with is also a considered factor. The discussion of all the paintings will lead to the legacy he left behind and the influence he had on artists of a later period such as Francis Bacon.

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Introduction

“El Greco, The Greek *homo universalis* of the Renaissance and mystic of Spanish Baroque, has always constituted an artistic watershed, a meteor suspended between the humanism of the East and the rationalism of the West, a paradox his own age was incapable of understanding. It wasn't until the 20th century that the enigma of the splendid Cretan could be read in its entirety”ⁱ.

Dominicos Theotokopoulos –widely known as El Greco- is a Greek-borne 16th century artist who started to be acknowledged during the end of the 19th century. He initially worked in Crete under the supervision of Byzantine icon-makers. Given that Crete was an island of Venetian holding, he must have been fully aware of all the crosscurrents in art that were sweeping Italy. After a few years of working in Candia he decided to move to Italy in order to be able to explore the works of the great artists. He, consequently, went to Venice and Rome where he met many celebrated painters of the High Renaissance. Having spent a few years in Italy he moved to Spain, initially planning on working for Phillip II. As this did not come about he ended in Toledo where he produced his most important paintings and the substance of his work. His permanent residence at Toledo and his dependence on ecclesiastical patronage were no doubt partly the consequence of his failure with the King.

The influence of Titian and Tintoretto, as well as the propaganda of the Counter-Reformation were for El Greco points of departure on his road to creating an absolutely personal body of work. He created feverish compositions, dematerialised bodies like flames, painted faces illuminated by inner passion, figures burning with desire for the otherworldly and overturned all rules of logic and balance.

The main focus of El Greco's art is usually on his 'religious' paintings, with little attention paid on the rest of his work. It is a fact, that he did not produce too many secular paintings, but the few that do exist are fine examples of his genius. His portraits, for example, form an integral part of his work, combining his mystical style with the realism appropriate for portraits.

The objective of the created exhibition is to familiarize the audience with his portraits and connect them to his other known paintings. This juxtaposition will help the public appreciate a different aspect of his work and will facilitate their placing his

works into the context of art and portraiture of his time. Portraits of several artists, with whom El Greco was in contact, will also be presented. The total works of the exhibition will include some of his secular portraits, portraits of saints, portraits of Venetian artists and paintings of other Spanish artists of that time. Portraits of later artists such as Cézanne will also be incorporated in order to show the importance of El Greco's work and his impact on artists of different periods and styles.

ⁱ By Manos Stephanidis, curator of the National Gallery of Athens

Chapter I. The Early Years

I.1 El Greco's Byzantine Apprenticeship

In order to get a grasp of what El Greco's art incorporates one has to start from the beginning. El Greco commenced painting in Crete at a very early age as an apprentice to Byzantine icon-makers. The development of icon making in Crete started with the move of painters from Constantinople to Crete just before the fall of the city in 1453. The Cretan painters soon adopted a distinctive style different from the Byzantine one, characterised by precise outlines, modelling of the flesh with dark brown under paint and dense tiny highlights on the cheeks of the faces. In addition to that, they employed bright colours in the garments, geometrical treatment of the drapery and finally, balanced articulation of the composition. At the same time, features from Italian painting were assimilated and harmoniously adapted to the austere Byzantine traditionⁱ.

The ability of the painters to handle different styles must have been a consequence of the way in which the 15th century painters worked. This dual ability is also discernible in the early works of El Greco. The milieu in which he worked was rooted in tradition, yet open to the artistic aspirations of the time. The artistic environment that nurtured El Greco goes back to the Cretans: Michael Damaskinos, Georgios Klontzas and his circle, and by other paintersⁱⁱ. He rose quickly to a position of eminence among the painters in Crete and by 1563 was already known as a "maistro"ⁱⁱⁱ. He, there, painted both *alla greca* and *alla latina*^{iv} demonstrating how he had assimilated both the style of the Renaissance in Italy and the tradition of Byzantine icon making. El Greco was a citizen of Candia, which was the capital of Venetian-held Crete. Trade between Venice and Candia was, by then, well established and many books, paintings and prints were exchanged. He was, therefore, fully aware of both Eastern and Western crosscurrents in art, as well as in other aspects of culture.

A valuable example of his early work is the painting of *Saint Luke painting the Virgin with Child* (plate 1). In this icon El Greco paints Saint Luke in the traditional way^v and displays Byzantine portrayal of saints; simultaneously he depicts Saint Luke in a similar way to that of Mark Antonio Raimondi^{vi} in his *Last Supper*. Furthermore,

the positioning of the saint is typical of Byzantine icons whereas the diagonal placement of the legs and the easel suggest western influences.

Compared to a traditional Byzantine icon, that of the *Virgin "Odigitria"* (comparative plate 1), one can see that El Greco used a similar pattern for the depiction of the Virgin and Child. The placement of the figures is exactly the same and so are the gestures of the hands. Nevertheless, this is only a small part of El Greco's icon; it seems as if he purposely placed it there in order to demonstrate his ability of combining Byzantine and Western traditions.

ⁱ *From Byzantium to El Greco*, exhibition catalogue, p. 49

ⁱⁱ For more information on Cretan icon-makers refer to: Zambakellis, Panos. *Introduction to Byzantine Painting*. Athens: 1985, pp. 95-98

ⁱⁱⁱ Refer to glossary

^{iv} Refer to glossary

^v According to tradition Saint Luke was the first saint to paint the Virgin Mary and is nearly always depicted in that manner

^{vi} Lopera. Konstandinidou: *Painting in Crete of the 15th and 16th centuries*

Chapter II. Late Renaissance in Venice and Rome

II.1 European and Venetian Traditions in Portraiture

Portraiture has been one of the earliest traditions in painting throughout Europe. Starting from early Christian icons to medieval portraits of feudal lords and into the Renaissance when portraiture really started to flourish. During the early fifteenth century portraiture was mainly limited to religious purposes and to rich patrons. Going into the sixteenth century portraiture started to evolve and became a greater part of painting traditions. However, the function of the portrait as it is comprehended today, begun in the Renaissance, starting with the 16th century and reaching its peak during the 17th century.

Even in the sixteenth century the esteem enjoyed by a portraitist could not match that of a history painter. Portraits could not take the first place since the painter was obliged to imitate and could not demonstrate the liveliness of his mind. The majority of portraits were painted for the private sphere but were also used as a means of conducting business; Titian exchanged his portraits for luxury items and Lorenzo Lotto used them to pay his rent. All portraits were in three-quarter view, replacing the previous profiles, and the hands were practically always included.

Separate portraits of women were rare in the second half of the sixteenth century. Only Titian kept the old tradition in a series of paintings in which his daughter appeared sometimes as herself and sometimes as a model for Pomona or Salome. The most important portraits politically were those of the doges. The state function of these portraits was twofold: for the outside world they served to represent republican continuity, and internally they were an important means of constantly reformulating the doge's conception of himself and his position in his state.

Great emphasis was also placed on the self-portrait, as it was a mean for the artists to elevate themselves. Titian painted himself as a nobleman with a golden chain and so did Tintoretto. The 'average person' who took revenge on the nobility by laying claim to his right to have his portrait painted also used this method. As a whole Venetian painting evolved its unique character from the various surrounding influences from both the East and the West. Through this sum of

influences developed a distinctive style. The Venetian style was to erupt into full glory with Giorgione and Titianⁱ.

II.2 Titian and El Greco. The Great Master or the Greater Student?

It is believed that by the time El Greco went to Italy he was already accomplished as an artist. Nevertheless, that does not diminish the influence Italian, especially Venetian, artists imposed on him. For some experts his stay in Venice is what influenced his work the most. When he moved to Venice he was instantly infatuated by the work of some painters. His admiring opinions of the leading sixteenth century artists have been preserved in the marginal comments he wrote in his personal copy of Vasari's *Lives of the Artists*. These leave no doubt about his intense esteem, mainly for Titian and Tintoretto.

Titian is one of the most important artists of Venice during the sixteenth century. He was the master of colour; never had it been so rich, vibrant and self-sustainingⁱⁱ. Colour became for him the only way to establish a mood, communicate a feeling and awaken a response in the viewer. Venetians were quick to take a liking to Titian's colour schemes.

Titian was one of the most eminent and skilful portrait painters of the sixteenth century. He, at first, worked in Italy where he did many portraits of members of ruling families, such as Isabella d'Este and Federigo Gonzaga. Eventually, he moved to Spain where he worked at the court of Charles II. So desirable were his portraits that on various occasions he was asked to depict famous men on which he had never laid eyes upon. Titian was sought after both because he was so fashionable but also because he was able to capture the expressions and gestures, giving his portraits an unprecedented warmth and vitalityⁱⁱⁱ. Titian did around two hundred formal portraits most of which are single figures. During the 1530s portraits had become his main preference. Not only was he interested in showing the psychological state of the individual but he also wanted to create a new relationship between the figure and its surrounding space.

Upon his arrival, El Greco entered Titian's workshop as an apprentice. By then, Titian^{iv} was no longer the master of bright colours but his colours had become as dark as his themes -but the palette of the whole world was then beginning to darken-.

In general, conditions for artists were a bit complicated; due to the Inquisition being the prophet among the arts was dangerous. The young Greco was quickly put into the mood and made copies of Titian, two of which are preserved: *Mater dolorosa* and a female portrait. From the content of all Titian's paintings he absorbed so much as to never become free of his influence.

Looking at portraits of both painters we see many similarities but also quite a few differences. For example, let us first compare Titian's *Portrait of a Man* (comparative plate 2) to El Greco's *Portrait of an Unknown Gentleman* (plate 2). Both men are depicted in a three-quarter pose towards the right and looking straight at us. They both wear formal clothing representing their class and status and look quite ceremonial. In Titian's painting we see the vivacity given on the man's shirt making it nearly more important than the sitter himself, on the other hand in El Greco's portrait the psychology of the man is more important than anything else. Through the eyes of the sitter and his face as a whole, one can see a melancholy and a certain state of mind. It is obvious that although the two artists followed the same scheme of portrait painting they were aiming at completely different things.

Another helpful comparative example is that of the two self-portraits. When Venetian artists painted themselves, they liked to adopt roles. Titian wanted to portray himself as a lord, painting himself with the gold chain. He did his *Self-Portrait* (comparative plate 3) in a very traditional manner; he is in a three-quarter pose, not looking straight at us, wearing a rich garment and chain and holding a pen or brush. He depicts himself as a rich and important artist showing both his status in society and the profession that gave it to him. On the contrary, El Greco depicts himself (plate 3) in a very different way^v; he is looking straight at us and is dressed in a way that is neither too formal nor too plain. He is more interested in expressing his mood than to showing-off his own stature.

Titian also influenced El Greco in the way he represents women. A perfect illustration is that of the penitent Magdalene, of whom Titian did many representations. One of them was the one he did in 1565 (comparative plate 4) when El Greco was still present at his studio, and in a position to view the painting. She is depicted in a three-quarter pose, with roughed hair falling over her neck and shoulders, as she is staring upwards. Her eyes are red and tearful showing her penitence and regret for her sins. This painting is supposed to evoke certain emotions of pity and regret rather than beauty. El Greco borrowed the general outlines of the

painting: the half-length portrait with the crossed hands, the rocky background on the right side and the open landscape on the left in his painting of *The Magdalene Penitent* (plate 4). Other similarities are Magdalene's stare, the way in which her hair falls on her shoulders and the general shape of her body. It is evident that El Greco differentiated his painting by distancing himself from the naturalism of Titian in order to fully invoke the feeling of penitence and regret. The colours used are also different from the strong and vibrant 'Venetian' colours

As a whole, El Greco learnt a great deal from Titian and was influenced a lot by his painting. He accumulated many elements, which he kept until the later stages of his life, but was also able to create a personal distinguished style.

II.3 El Greco's Portraits Compared to other Venetian Portraits

After having left Titian's studio El Greco continued working in Italy under Tintoretto and eventually on his own. He travelled a lot between Rome, Venice and other Italian cities^{vi} but spent most of his time working Venice. He had, by then acquired his own style and was painting on little wooden panels and not on canvases like were the Venetians. In brushwork he tried to approach Tintoretto, from whom he learnt much, but attained it at a later stage. In terms of colour schemes, the Venetians used a very specific one^{vii} that actually made them famous. El Greco followed it at first but later changed his tones: "the dark, bare background and the sparsity of the chromatic scale of El Greco suggests dramatic ness and the figure throbs with existential anxiety. The blacks, the whites and the greys become the bearers of a metaphysical shudder"^{viii}.

In order to show his gratitude to his spiritual fathers he placed them like a large signature in the right-hand corner of an early version of *The Cleansing of the Temple* (comparative plate 5); Titian, Michelangelo, and Raphael are placed by the side of Clovio and perhaps also of Bassani and Tintoretto. In his art of portraiture Greco drew his primary strength from Tintoretto and Veronese.

El Greco also took out a lot from artists such as Jacopo Bassano. In paintings such as *The Adoration of the Shepherds* Bassano included the main theme of the painting in a rural surrounding with many different scenes. Bassano then placed in the lower right of the picture a small boy that is kneeling and blowing at a piece of coal^{ix}.

El Greco took this aspect of the picture and created a painting of a *Boy lighting a Candle* (plate 5). El Greco completely changed the placement of the boy, having him face the viewer, focusing on his face and hands and at the way he is looking at the candle. Another painting from which El Greco might have been influenced, when doing this painting is Caravaggio's *Boy with Guitar* (comparative plate 6). What is of interest in both paintings is the lighting; neither work has natural lighting, whereas in both cases the faces of the boys are lit artificially with what could nowadays be a spotlight.

II.4 Mannerism

By the end of the 1520s the attitude towards the arts changed from that prevailing during the High Renaissance. Artists started to perceive their works as a means of showing their creativity and their spirituality. Paintings were no longer historical descriptions that had to be done in a certain way but rather personal expressions of virtuosity and temperament. This whole attitude largely known as *Mannerism* spread quickly first through Italy and then around Europe. In Italy the characteristic tendencies of Mannerism were to refine even further the technical virtuosity, the elegance that had been so consummately balanced with both monumental and human values in the High Renaissance. This gave way to an emphasis on the *figura serpentinata*^x, on attenuated forms, on the bizarre contrast of poses and colours and even to strange, sometime morbid and pornographic tensions^{xi}.

When El Greco was in Italy Mannerism had already spread across Italy. Artists from Rome and Florence, such as Michelangelo followed that course. Michelangelo influenced him, as he did his whole generation but the great and vital influence of that period was Tintoretto. Venetian colour and Mannerist line is what characterizes Tintoretto the best. During his lifetime he was a prolific portrait painter making many intense portraits of sombre old men. Through his portrait of *Jacopo Sansovino* (comparative plate 7) one can perceive Tintoretto's qualities as a portraitist as well as his effect on El Greco.

In the North, Parmigianino took the early Mannerist style to an extreme. The most famous example of the extreme attenuation of his style is the *Madonna with the Long Neck* (comparative plate 8), notable for its expressive distortion of perspective

and proportions. El Greco must have been fully aware of this painting as his later work of *The Coronation of the Virgin* (comparative plate 9) contains some similarities. Both paintings depict the same subject matter^{xii} but evidently in quite different ways. The most striking similarity is the positioning of the Virgin. In the painting of *The Merciful Virgin* (comparative plate 10) we have essentially the same subject matter and the Virgin holds, yet again, a distorted pose.

ⁱ Williams, p.22

ⁱⁱ Williams, p.85

ⁱⁱⁱ Williams, p.112

^{iv} For more information on Titian's life refer to Williams, pp. 30-35

^v It is debatable whether this is El Greco, but most scholars argue that it is

^{vi} El Greco worked under the Farnese family for some time; he travelled to the cities where they were in control

^{vii} For more information on Venetian painting refer to Huse pp. 250-20

^{viii} National Gallery, Exhibition Catalogue: *From El Greco to Cézanne*. Athens: 1992, p.37

^{ix} Lopera, p.383

^x Refer to glossary

^{xi} Piper, p.164

^{xii} The coronation of the Virgin is not included in any of the Holly Books and is an invention of the Middle Ages. The first examples of paintings with this subject matter are of the 12th century in Italy and France. It eventually became a favourite amongst patrons so El Greco was asked to paint it on several occasions.

Chapter III. Spanish Traditions in Painting

III.1 Spanish Portraiture

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries form the Spanish Golden Ages of painting. At that period art reached heights of naturalism, mixing the real and the sublimeⁱ. This can be hard to believe since regarding politics and the economy Spain was not at its greatest strength. Fortunes of artists were linked to their country's economy, especially during the 1580s. During the first decades of the seventeenth century things changed for the better. A general forward momentum in the economy soon became evident in the arts. As a result, artistic production begun to surge with religious paintings predominating. The wealth of ecclesiastical foundations and the willingness of rich patrons to decorate churches as well as their own homes meant that there were strong financial incentives for painting such religious images. Until the early seventeenth century artists ranked as craftsmenⁱⁱ. Their desire to elevate their craft to a status of art created a development in Biblical knowledge as well as familiarity with the church fathers.

Phillip II was the one to reshape the history of Spanish painting by importing art and artists from Flanders and Italy. Titian was considered the unofficial court painter, as he refused to leave Venice, compelling the King to recruit foreigners to serve the immediate needs of the court. The first step was to employ a portraitist, Antonios Mor. The initial training of most Spanish artists was in the Hispano-Flemish style, which meant that their understanding of the language of Northern art had already been altered by translation into a local dialect. Given the size of cities and the difficulties in communication, it might be thought that the average Spanish artist was exposed to a limited range of artistic styles and ideas.

Portraiture soon became one of the most important genres of art. Faithfulness to nature was especially important in the portrait. The highest praise for a portrait was to claim that it had been mistaken for a real person. Mor who become the official court painter was mostly concerned with physiognomic accuracy and not with expression. He mainly executed portraits of the royal family and court officials, but portraits of commoners also became fashionable. It was, however, not right to flatter sitters of the lower classesⁱⁱⁱ.

III.2 El Greco's Portraits compared to other Spanish Works

El Greco was one of the most eager artists to work for Philip II during the construction of the palace, which alas never took place. He moved from Italy to Spain in 1577 intending to stay for a few years in Madrid. Having failed to work for the king he went to Toledo to complete an order of a number of religious paintings, such as those of the church of Santo Domingo el Antiguo, planning on returning to Madrid. He was, however, drawn to Toledo because for him it was the “wealthiest see in Christendom after Rome”^{iv}.

During his early years in Spain El Greco tried to follow the Spanish traditions of painting, in order for him to be accepted amongst the patrons. His style, though, was not popular amongst the nobility of Madrid. After moving to Toledo he soon established himself as a popular artist. By the 1580s he had acquired quite a clientele consisting of clergymen, nobles and merchants. He was shrewd enough to take advantage of the fact that he was a foreigner, always signing his paintings in Greek. Most of his early work in Spain consists of religious paintings. Amongst those, nonetheless, he also executed many portraits. Through these portraits one witnesses his agility as a painter but also the wide circle of acquaintances that he had acquired.

One of the most important portraits of that time is that of the *Gentleman with Hand on his Chest* (plate 6). This is an unknown man depicted in a melancholic, noble and vain manner. This kind of portrait is similar to those seen in the *Burial of the Count of Orgaz*^v (plate 10) sharing a quiet and melodious air. The Italian influence – especially from Titian and Tintoretto- is still evident in this portrait through the illuminated hands and face, which contrast the very dark background^{vi}. Another portrait of that period is that of a *Man from House of Leiva* (plate 7) where he represents a Spanish nobleman in quite a traditional manner. The sitter is depicted as a genuine aristocrat bearing a look of dignity and composure of honour and pride. However, even if El Greco tried to follow Spanish guidelines it is evident that he was mainly interested in the psychological state of the sitter. This is also the case in the *Portrait of an Elderly Gentleman* (comparative plate 11). This is one of El Greco's smallest portraits; it only contains the sitter's head focusing on the characteristics of his face. It is an early example of the works of his last period in which he portrayed asymmetrical faces and very strong gazes. By doing so he managed to convey the personality, psychology and thoughts of the person.

El Greco managed to create a distinctive style different from all other painters. He, however, still kept some of the influences he had acquired from other Spanish painters. For example, he continued to do portraits of royals as did the other painters. One of those portraits is that of *St. Louis, King of France* (comparative plate 12). In this portrait he depicts the King of France in quite a particular way. The king looks tired and not very strong. The way in which he is holding the *main de justice*^{vii} is neither manly nor fitting a king. On the contrary Coello's^{viii} portrait of *Prince Don Carlos*^{ix} (comparative plate 13) depicts the prince at the age of fourteen as a true royal. This is one of Coello's best portraits, when his style was fully matured. He always drew the wives and children of the king straight on the canvas with precision and sensitivity to the smallest details. He here places the prince before the spectator with an intense immediacy and simplicity. The intensity of the subject's expression and the enormous expressiveness of the strong, elegant hands, and the beautiful tonal precision of the orange clothing are fully Venetian, whereas the technical virtuosity of the furs is outstanding. Subsequently, even if both Coello and El Greco have strong Venetian influences, it comes out in their work in a completely different manner.

While in Spain, El Greco also executed a few portraits of women. The most important one is that of the *Lady with the Ermine* (plate 8). This lady is not a saint^x but someone unknown. The portrait does not deviate a great deal from the canons of the time. Compared to the *Portrait of a Lady* (comparative plate 14), which was painted during the same period we can draw various conclusions. To start with, both have the same pose and are looking directly at the viewer. Their faces have similar characteristics with the exception that the one of the *Portrait of a Lady* is more elongated. This elongation gives her more of a stoic and melancholic look. In addition, her clothing is simpler whereas the other woman is wearing an expensive fur wrap. In general the woman with the fur looks more elegant and composed whereas the other lady has the face of an aging woman full of sorrow. It is possible that while painting these pictures El Greco had different intentions: in the one with the fur he is mainly interested in showing the status and composure of the woman whereas in the other he is interested in evoking the emotions and serenity of the psyche of the woman and not in just depicting her facial characteristics.

During the last years of his life (1601-1614) El Greco continued doing portraits, mainly of people who were close to him, producing more portraits than at any previous time. He painted mostly clergymen, like the portrait of *Fray Hortensio*

Felix Paravicino (plate 9) and that of *Diego de Covarrubias* (comparative plate 15). These portraits are endowed with a typically Spanish austerity, but still contain the Venetian succulence in the blacks, and richness in the whites, both of which stand out strongly against the masterful neutrality of the background^{xi}.

ⁱ Catalogue of *The Golden Age of Spanish Painting*, p.9

ⁱⁱ Catalogue p.14

ⁱⁱⁱ Catalogue p.15

^{iv} Catalogue p.11

^v Refer to chapter V for more details

^{vi} Bronstein, p.52

^{vii} Refer to glossary

^{viii} Alonso Coello Sánchez, 1531/2-1588

Received early education in Portugal. Around 1550 went to Flanders, studying at least until 1554, under Antonis Mor, as a protégé of Cardinal Granvela. In 1555 he went to Castile, in service of Philip II, who distinguished him with his favour and even treated him with a certain familiarity. His style basically follows the Flemish objectivity and precision and the psychological depth and individuality which it brings to the depiction of his sitters. He owes much to Titian, and is known to have made copies of number of his works. His main activity was that of a portrait painter. He has tactile values, lively brushstroke, and rich sensual qualities of Titian's work.

^{ix} Son of Philip II and his first wife Maria, his dramatic life marked by illness, a violent personality and confrontation with an implacable father, created a legend around him, converting him into a Romantic hero.

^x Most of El Greco's portraits of women are of saints

^{xi} Pastor, p.42

Chapter IV. *The Burial of the Count of Orgaz*

IV.1 Formal Analysis of the Painting and its Identifiable Portraits

During the 16th century several artists were being commissioned to decorate buildings such as palaces and churches. By doing so, the status of the building was instantly elevated. The chosen subject of the paintings or frescoes had to relate to the edifice or the rooms in which they hung. On March 18, 1586 El Greco was given a contract to paint *The Burial of the Count of Orgaz* (plate 10) in the modest church of Santo Tomé in Toledo. In the painting El Greco was supposed to make a representation of the miracle, which is supposed to have happened when the Knight of Orgazⁱ was being buried in the church. The prescriptions in the contract were very strict and El Greco was dictated a specific framework which predetermined the composition of the paintingⁱⁱ. The canvas had to give visual meaning to the story as specified and no clemency was given for improvisation.

El Greco divided the composition into two distinct parts. One deals with the earthly events, whereas the other deals with the celestial ones. The contrast between the two parts constitutes the fundamental axis of the painting's compositional structureⁱⁱⁱ. There exists a powerful originality in the composition, which is equal to that of Raphael, Titian and Tintoretto in their treatment of similar themes.

The intention of this painting seems to be the contrary of that which the Protestant North later strove to attain: Frans Hals's groups of musketeers (comparative plate 16) and Rembrandt's *Night Watch* (comparative plate 17), give groups of portraits in the form of a complete narrative. In the Orgaz picture the portraits of contemporaries are introduced into a legend without re-casting it. Through this group of naturalistic portraits the Catholic miracle-story of the Entombment of the Count of Orgaz receives its worldly affirmation, just as the Dutch portrait groups by stylistic transformation touch with poetry the burgher world. Titian had also in the past included portraits of wealthy benefactors in religious paintings, like for instance in the altarpiece of the *Pesaro Madonna* (comparative plate 18) in which he included the donor, Jacopo Pesaro, in the lower right hand of the picture. By observing both paintings one can conclude that it was quite common for painters to depict religious scenes while including actual people in them. These paintings have, indeed, many

differences both in terms of composition and in terms of representation. Nevertheless, they are significant as they help us apprehend the extent to which his predecessors affected El Greco.

The picture contains a plenitude of portraits. The portraits retain their full individual character, so much, as to arouse perpetual curiosity concerning the names of the persons represented^{iv}. We can discern that the funeral consists of priests, nobles and men of letters. Of the group of nobles and gentlemen crowded together, the six in the foreground are all comparatively young whereas the rest look quite older. There has been much speculation on the matter^v and only two or three figures can be identified with certainty. The first figure is that of the kneeling boy on the left of the picture (comparative plate 19). The boy is believed to be El Greco's son, Jorge Manuel. Another identifiable figure is that of the profile of a man with a grey beard (comparative plate 20) on the opposite side of the painting, above the left shoulder of the auxiliary priest in the transparent white surplice. This figure can be recognised from other portraits as Antonio de Covarubbias (comparative plate 21). This gallery of portraits is arguably one of the earliest and finest representations of the formal and the psychological prototype of the Spanish nobility.

The portraits in this painting have all the qualities of Greco's portraiture. Justi found the portraits by the hand of Greco "corpse-like in colouring, shadowy in modelling". Others again have been struck by the "somnambulism in the expression of the faces, the ascetic and the ecstatic, the cruel and the passionate, kept under by self-repression and outward coldness, a nervous laceration, suggesting Toledo blades, so sharp as in course of time to penetrate the sheaths in which they rest"^{vi}. What is common in all these portraits is only their impressionistic quality, which in the later period is strikingly reminiscent of the technique of Dutch contemporaries, their freedom from deliberate 'distortions' and their relative naturalism.

By closely observing this painting one can draw many conclusions on El Greco's rendering of portraits. To start with, there is a very obvious distinction between the secular and the religious part. This may be the case, because of his restrictions due to the shape and size of the canvas. However, this partition can also be a purposeful way of emphasizing the difference between the two. By looking at the portraits closely one sees that they all share some similar characteristics: all the faces have a particular elongation, which in some cases is accentuated by the beards and moustaches (comparative plate 22). Another interesting aspect of the portraits is that

of the glances of each individual. They are all looking at different directions; some are looking downwards, others are looking upwards while others are staring directly at us. In the lower left hand-side of the painting there are two priests (comparative plate 23) in a grey and a black robe. The priest with the grey robe has a sombre look on his face and is looking towards the floor seeming distraught, whereas the priest with the black robe is staring right at him. El Greco is using the eyes of the individuals in order to bestow on them a particular manner. So, even if nearly all the faces share similar characteristics (comparative plate 24), they acquire individuality through their eyes and the positioning of their heads. Another important observation, is that the faces of the lower part of the painting and those of the upper part share similar characteristics^{vii}. By doing so he manages to give ordinary people a pious appearance while depicting the saints like common people.

El Greco grew to full maturity with this painting, which was the fundamental touchstone within the critical movement that rehabilitated his artistic reputation. It was considered the major work of his Spanish period, a view that was based on the extraordinary quality of the portraits in the lower parts of the painting. Later on, thanks to the renewed attention given to the upper section of the painting, El Greco came to be seen not merely as the precursor of Velasquez and of the great tradition of naturalism in Spanish painting, but as the creator of a unique, absolute and universal art^{viii}.

ⁱ For more information on the Count of Orgaz refer to Serraller pp. 8-10

ⁱⁱ This was the time of the Inquisition, so all religious paintings had to follow very specific guidelines or the artists were prosecuted.

ⁱⁱⁱ Huse, p.11

^{iv} Goldscheider, p. 13

^v Critics have gone to great lengths to identify the portraits, arousing many disputes amongst them

^{vi} Goldscheider, p.13

^{vii} More detail will be given on this aspect on the following chapter

^{viii} Serraller, p.23

Chapter V. Portraits of Saints

V.1 Portrayal of Saints

Amongst his many portraits, El Greco also painted portraits of both male and female saints. It is essential to examine these portraits as they contain secular characteristics combined with theological aspects. The *Burial of the Count of Orgaz* painting already exhibits these qualities: close to nature in the lower, earthy groups, remote from nature in the higher, heavenly. Greco was normal when he wanted to be, that is in his portraits; and he deliberately distorted his drawings, like a Mannerist, when he intended to do so, that is, when he was representing supernatural figuresⁱ.

During his lifetime El Greco did many series of saints but the most important ones are the ones of the Evangelists. This series of spiritually inspired men, incorporating the 'sketching' technique and the strong use of colour, comprise a set belonging to the last years of his output. A part of that series is the painting of *St. Peter and St. Paul* (plate 11). In this painting the two saints are depicted in three quarter poses. They are both wearing the traditional garments and bear their characteristic symbols. They are situated outdoors and there is no specific background except for the blue sky. In another example of the same subject matter (comparative plate 25) one can see that El Greco used the same composition but with completely different detailing. For instance, the saints are situated in an interior and St. Paul is holding a book. In a further portrait of *St. Paul* (plate 12), he is represented as a man of middle age, wearing a greenish blue robe and purple tunic. The treatment of the clothes is outstanding with shining touches of bold brushwork.

The men of those pictures have in common this air of intensity, not only transmitted through the facial expressions, but also in every brush. It may be worth using the interpretation of the hands as an example. At times they are left unfinished, but there is no lack of expressiveness. This lack of completion in certain areas, such as the hands or the clothes, is permitted for a mature artistⁱⁱ. By studying these paintings one can see that El Greco used a 'formula' for depicting the figures and the faces in particular. By closely observing the face of St. Paul (comparative plate 26) and the face of Christ in the *Saint Scarf* (comparative plate 27) one can see many similarities. The characteristics of the faces are very similar; the long noses

highlighted by a streak of white paint as well as the sorrowful eyes that are looking directly at us.

El Greco similarly completed numerous replicas of *The Tears of St. Peter* (plate 13). This is one of the best versions of the subject, in the iconographic style characteristic of El Greco. St. Peter, with the authoritative sign of inseparable keys, is repentant and tearful for having denied Christ three times that morning. In the left background is the angel, which forms part of this religious work. St. Peter is true to the iconography of the old apostle, with full beard, and, true also to the colours always used for the tunic and robe are the blues and ochres. The work shows the colours and shades typical of the painter, and also reveals his personal style.

In all those paintings, prominent as is also the role given to colour, as he is far from making lavish use of varied colour effects. His style departs from naturalism and becomes more spiritualised, the colours growing more monotonous. Like most mannerists he always applies his colours thinly. Later in his life El Greco remains the colourist that he was, but develops from “a technician into a magician of light and colour”ⁱⁱⁱ. Colour did not by a long way have the importance for him that it had for Titian, for instance.

One last example of a portrait of a saint is that of *Saint Luke* (plate 14). This portrait is rather remarkable because of its comparison to El Greco’s icon of *Saint Luke painting Virgin with Child* (plate 1). Through these two images one can see the shift of El Greco’s style from somewhat Byzantine to something completely different and unique. In the icon St. Luke is depicted in the traditional Byzantine manner, painting a wooden panel of the Virgin and Child. There are, certainly, Western elements in the picture but it is mainly characterized as Byzantine. On the contrary, the later painting of St. Luke has nothing to do with the Byzantine tradition. The saint is painting the Virgin in a book; in addition, the figure of the saint is similar to the rest of El Greco’s portraits with the elongated faces and the sombre faces.

V.2 The *Laocoon*

The painting of the *Laocoon* (plate 15) is one of El Greco’s masterpieces of his final period. The abstract nature of the picture, which combines a landscape background and a figurative foreground, marks it off from all previous work. The

formation of the figures, their dreamy, mechanical lifelessness and their lack of relation to their environment make this painting the epitome of El Greco's Mannerist style. The painting is obviously suggested by the Hellenistic group^{iv}, -which emphasizes dramatic expression, the eyes being cut deeply, the mouth open, the hair twisted and the hair dishevelled- but with many fervent differences.

As in most of his works, El Greco has here incorporated elements from his other paintings. For instance, the face of the *Laocoon* (comparative plate 28) is very similar to that of St. Peter in one of the versions of *The tears of Saint Peter* (comparative plate 29). It is as if Greco took the face of St. Peter and placed on top of the body of Laocoon, but in such a way that one does not find it disturbing, except for the difference of colour between the body and the face. Another characteristic of the *Laocoon* that is evident in other paintings is his eyes. By looking at the eyes of Christ in the painting *El Espolio* (comparative plate 30), one can see the exact same look of the tearful, watery eyes looking upwards. This is, therefore, further evidence that El Greco used the same features for depicting both saints and people.

ⁱ Goldscheider, p.14

ⁱⁱ Pastor, p.28

ⁱⁱⁱ Houser, p.265

^{iv} Artists of the Renaissance studied the Antique, and the excavation of the sculpture at that time arose great interest

Chapter VI. El Greco's Legacy

VI.1 The Pope Series

El Greco is a painter whose genius hadn't been recognized for a long period of time. Only during the late 19th century did critics begin to grant him the fame he deserved. However, even if he wasn't widely established he did influence artists a great deal. A series of paintings that is remarkably interesting and useful is the portraits of popes starting from Titian and ending with El Greco. Through these paintings one witnesses the series of changes for the equivalent subject matter and the evolution from one painting to the next.

The series starts with Titian's portrait of *Pope Paul III and His Grandsons Alessandro and Ottavio Farnese* (comparative plate 31). Titian's study of Pope Paul III and his grandsons has been called "the most dramatic portrait yet painted". At centre is Pope Paul, a shrewd 77-year-old who was both a great advocate of reform and also one of the most lavish dispensers of papal favours in the history of the Church. Behind him stands the pious Alessandro, whom the Pope had made a cardinal at 14. At right, Titian shows Ottavio in a genuflecting posture that suggests not humility but a fawning plea for privilegeⁱ. This painting was done at a period when ecclesiastical patronage was at its peak. It is therefore bizarre that Titian chose to depict the pope in such a manner and not in a single portrait where he would be standing straight and appearing resilient.

The next painting is that of El Greco's *Don Fernando Niño de Guevara* (plate 16). In this portrait we perceive a new spirituality and intensity of expression. El Greco presents the cardinal with a cool and severe air, making the portrait one of the great symbols of the age of the Counter-Reformation and men's alienation from each other and from themselvesⁱⁱ. El Greco's representation of the cardinal is much more representative of the times than Titian's portrait, since he represents the cardinal as a man of authority.

Another example of such a portrait is El Greco's portrait of *Charles de Guise* (plate 17). This work is earlier than the other portrait that is why it is more severe in following the canons of Renaissance painting. The painting has a few emblematic connotations, such as the parrot, which symbolises the cardinal's hope to become

pope. In general, this portrait is a typical mid sixteenth century austere church-official. It moreover demonstrates how the same artist can use in his portraits certain techniques in order to present an individual in the desired fashion.

The preceding painting was an apparent inspiration to Diego Velasquezⁱⁱⁱ who completed the portrait of *Pope Innocent X* (plate 18). As he had become established as a court painter he was free to paint in any manner he pleased. Velasquez produced many portraits of staggering freedom one of which is that of the pope. It is believed that Velasquez was fully aware of El Greco's art and that he had even gone to his studio in Toledo. This work is therefore important in linking El Greco's pieces to that of artists of a later generation.

The last painting of the series is a modern one, the *Study after Velasquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X* (plate 19) by Francis Bacon^{iv}. This vivid and powerful invention transformed the shrewd and smug pope into a monstrously depraved image^v. The pope is seen at full length in the white skirts. He has, therefore, some of the holiness equivalent for a pope, but he is also cut off, exposed and held up for scrutiny. As a result, starting from the initial painting by Titian and ending with Bacon's portrait one can appreciate how the equivalent theme can be scrutinised, dematerialised, and then reassembled in order to create the desired effect.

VI.2 From El Greco to Cézanne

Cézanne was an artist who believed in making copies of works done by Renaissance masters. He executed many scores of drawings^{vi} made from prints and plaster casts either in the Louvre or in his studio. These carefully drawn studies rarely fail to convey the illusion of having been done from life models. One of these paintings is that of *La femme à la Fourrure* (comparative plate 32). Though the connection of the work with El Greco's *Lady with the Ermine* (plate 8) had been noticed, there were enough differences between the two paintings to exclude the idea of a copy, the more so as Cézanne had never seen the original^{vii}. However, Cézanne must have known an engraving after the picture reproduced in Charles Blanc's *École Espagnole*^{viii}, since he copied another plate from the same publication.

On various occasions, Cézanne had used similar illustrations as sources for paintings in which he was 'free' to invent the colours. Not only did he supply colours

of his own choice, dominated by nuances of blue, but he also changed the general aspect of the image that he used as a model. This is the case in this particular painting where the governing colour is blue in contrast to the original, which is brown. In addition, he flattened the face, neutralized its expression and suppressed the character of the fur boa. In contrast, he has kept the same pose and the right hand is still resting on the fur collar.

According to the interpretations of a French art historian, Louis Dimier, published in 1914, it was Cézanne's supposed connection with Tintoretto and El Greco that contributed to his emergence during the early years of the century, at the time of the 'rediscovery' of El Greco^{ix}.

VI.3 El Greco and Modern Greece

Nowadays, El Greco is considered to be the most important Greek artist of the Renaissance. There are continuous exhibitions of his works and his paintings are included in all major museums around the world. Although his art is supposed to represent the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it is so avant-garde that it still influences artists of today. A fine example of that influence is a Modern Greek artist called Manolis Polimeris.

In his latest exhibition Polimeris presented a series of works based on paintings of El Greco. As he stated himself: "my intention was not to copy the spirit of the period of El Greco, and even less to copy him... I used his painting as a model, in order to draw from it not the pictorial elements but the way in which he places them in regards to the space, the background and the composition"^x. Three of these paintings are: *El Greco's self Portrait* (plate 20), which is based on El Greco's *Self-Portrait* (plate 3), *Portrait of a Cardinal* (comparative plate 33) based on El Greco's *Don Fernando Niño de Guevara* (plate 16), and the *Laocoon* (comparative plate 34) based on El Greco's *Laocoon* (plate 15). In all three paintings the artist has used El Greco's images but has integrated them into his own space and used his individual colour scheme and background. It is consequently apparent that El Greco has made an enormous impact on artists from his own era until these days.

ⁱ Williams, p.116

ⁱⁱ Houser, p.268

ⁱⁱⁱ Court painter to Philip IV of Spain

^{iv} The only British figurative painter to rank with the most distinguished artists to emerge in the immediate post-war period

^v Hunter, p.294

^{vi} The majority of his drawings after works of art are interpretations of sculptures from Donatello to the mid nineteenth century.

^{vii} El Greco's canvas had been acquired in Spain for King Louis-Philippe and had hung in the Louvre from 1836 to the revolution of 1848, when the King's collection was confiscated. It was subsequently shipped to the exiled monarch in London and sold at Christie's in 1851.

^{viii} Paris, 1869

^{ix} Murphy, p.140

^x From the catalogue of Polimeri's 1990 exhibition

Conclusion

Through the previous analysis of El Greco's influences and works one can conclude that his compositions, and particularly his portraiture have certain precise qualities. His figures are stylised and have bold outlines while their clothing has a gracefulness contrasting the slenderness of the figures. The composition of the paintings is somewhat scenographic, but most important of all is the prevailing mysticism and unreal light.

His early portraits seem Venetian, like those of his teachers, but his later and riper are more akin to the painters of El Fayumⁱ than to Tintoretto. The construction and the expression of his sacred pictures grow ever more Byzantine with then years; his forms becoming increasingly elongated and graceful; but to the Spaniards he remained always El Greco, the Greek. In Venice he was considered Venetian while the Roman Mannerists regarded him as one of themselves. Yet in his mature period, as the Greek of Toledo, he discovered painting once more himself, as an art he had made all his own, that he had learnt from no one, and that he could transmit to no one, an art unsuitable to reproduce this visible world, but apt to record the world of his own visionsⁱⁱ.

Spanish historians of the 18th century said the following: "El Greco was a great painter, the student of Titian. He did important works but, seeing that Titian mistook his paintings for works, he decided to change his technique. Then he made his works so eccentric that he became ridiculous and worthy of scorn, both for his disjointed drawing and his unpleasant colours"ⁱⁱⁱ.

El Greco has usually been correlated with the Spanish school, being proclaimed its founder. But in some instances El Greco is seen as a founding pillar for the modern movement, which started to come about during the 18th and 19th centuries. The portraits of the two ladies by El Greco and Cézanne show the long connection that can be drawn between the two artists.

Through the varied works presented one can definitely see the importance of El Greco's compositions as well the magnificent influence they had on artists of his time as well as later periods. His portraits combine the mysticism and spirituality acquired from the Byzantine icons with the modernity evident in Western pictures.

ⁱ Place in Egypt where many portraits made out of mummies were found

ⁱⁱ Goldscheider, p.5

ⁱⁱⁱ *From El Greco to Cézanne*, p.100

Glossary

Alla Greca: the making of gold-ground icons in the traditional Byzantine manner

Alla Latina: the making of small-scale pictures in a hybrid Greco-Italian style

Figura Serpentinata: an emphasis given to the serpentine line of bodies during the High Renaissance

Horror Vacui: features accentuated in subsequent years

Main de Justice: hand of ivory with three raised fingers, placed at the end of the royal stick, symbolising of royal justice in France

Maistro: the 'master' in a school of painting, or the most important icon-maker in a monastery

Catalogue of Works

1. *Saint Luke painting Virgin with Child*, 1560-1567

El Greco, 1541-1614

Egg-tempera on panel

Signed "XEIP ΔΟΜΗΝΙΚΟΥ"

41.6cm. high by 33cm. wide

Benaki Museum, Athens

This icon depicts Saint Luke as the painter of the Virgin Mary, which is the traditional Byzantine way. It is placed as a first work in the exhibition as it shows El Greco's first steps as a painter. It combines the Byzantine traditions as well as Western influences, which were eminent in Crete during the sixteenth century. It is additionally the only existing example of a movable icon. There are few existing works of the early period of El Greco, and that is why this one is quite important. Related works are *The Adoration of the Magi*, *The Dormition of the Virgin* and *The Passions of Christ*, which were all made in Crete when El Greco was still in his early twenties.

2. *Portrait of an Unknown Gentleman*, 1600-1605

El Greco, 1541-1614

Oil on canvas

The Prado, Madrid

This is one of El Greco's masterpieces of portraiture, demonstrating the deepest psychological insight and an extraordinary assurance of technique, which can only be compared with the portraits of *Doctor Jerónimo Ceballos*, or that of the *Old Gentleman*, both at the Prado. Cossío pointed out that it belongs to a more mature period than that of the popular *Gentleman with Hand on his Chest*, and emphasized how in the progressively lighter technique it already brings to mind Velasquez. It can be dated to around 1600-5, a point on which almost all critics agree, with the single exception of Cossío, who leaves open the possibility that it belongs to the final years.

One cannot be sure whether it was studied by Velasquez or not, but one should remember that the Sevillian painter had some portraits by El Greco in his studio. It is incorporated in the exhibition, as it is a fine example of the importance El Greco gave to expressing the psychological state of the sitter.

Related works are *The Gentleman with Hand on his Chest* and the *Portrait of a Gentleman*.

3. *Self-Portrait*, c.1590

El Greco, 1541-1614

Oil on canvas

52.7cm. high by 46.7cm. wide

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Several scholars have identified this man with El Greco himself, although there are no documented likenesses to the artist. El Greco would have been around fifty in 1590, when stylistic evidence indicates this picture was painted, but the sitter's wistful, searching stare, characteristic of advanced age, leaves his identity problematic.

Resemblances between this man and El Greco's portrait of his son, Jorge Manuel, suggest that he could have been a Greek relative of the painter's who was part of his household. The large white ruff which cradles the pale, lined face is characteristic of Spanish costume during the later 16th century, when sumptuary laws were enacted to restrict excessive luxuries in dress. The sombre background and dark cloak contribute to the austere, introspective mood of the picture. Since there are no other existing known self-portraits of El Greco, this automatically becomes an significant picture. It is essential to place it in the exhibition since self-portraits form a vital element of portraiture and aid the public understand the artist's point of view.

4. *The Magdalene Penitent*, 1580-1585

El Greco, 1541-1614

Oil on canvas

104.6cm. high by 84.3cm. wide

The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Missouri

The Penitent Magdalene was always a symbol of penitence and of confession of sins. During his lifetime El Greco represented Magdalene in many of his images creating five different types of paintings. It is most probable that El Greco started painting Magdalene under the tutelage of Titian. Titian himself depicted her in several paintings, one of which is that of the Napoli Museum (comparative plate 4). This particular painting was done in Spain around 1580. Magdalene has a certain look of ecstasy and has her hands on her legs. Her hair and clothing cover her breasts so that there is no evident sign of nudity. The painting has many strong diagonals, which are created by the figure as well as the clouds and the rocks. This picture is placed in the exhibition, as it is essential for the viewers to perceive the way in which El Greco represented women. It is also valuable as it can be directly compared to Titian's equivalent paintings of the Mary Magdalene.

Related works are several similar paintings of Magdalene such as the ones at the Hermitage and the Worcester Museum of Art.

5. *Boy lighting a Candle*, 1570-1576

El Greco, 1541-1614

Oil on canvas

60.5cm. high by 50.5cm. wide

Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte, Napoli

While in Rome, El Greco did many works of children; children with candles as well as children playing with coal. This particular painting of a boy playing with a candle is quite impressive due to its realism. The most interesting aspect of this painting is its lighting. The figure of the child is only lit from one source of light, which is the candle in his hands. El Greco chose an everyday scene, and used it as an experiment for playing with light and dark, and creating certain effects with shadows. This work is one of his first, where there is no natural light.

Related works are other paintings of the same series such as the *Boy Lighting a Candle* from the Virginia Kraft Payson collection.

6. *Gentleman with Hand on his Chest*, c.1580

El Greco, 1541-1614

Signed, lower left corner

Oil on canvas

The Prado, Madrid

This is one of the most important portraits executed during El Greco's early years in Toledo. The gentleman in question has been identified as Juan de Oliva, whose noble status is indicated by the sword, the half-hidden medal, the hand in the attitude of swearing an oath, and the rich clothing. The melancholic expression on the face of this Toledan, whose head is surrounded by a small halo, the richly adorned hilt of the sword, the hand, the ruff and the jabot are the five points on which the eye rests after contemplating the dark background and the rich black fabric.

The very dramatic technique of throwing into relief the illuminated face and hands against a very dark background is a Venetian sign borrowed from Titian and Tintoretto.

This painting is included in the exhibition as it is a fine paradigm of most of El Greco's male portraits.

Related paintings are the *Portrait of an Unknown Gentleman* the *Man from House of Leiva*.

7. *Man from House of Leiva*, c.1580

El Greco 1541-1614

Oil on canvas

88cm. high by 69cm. wide

The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts Collection, Montreal

This portrait is dated between 1580 and 1586 and is directly linked with the *Man with Hand on his Chest* and the *Burial of the Count of Orgaz*; the reason being that they share the same style. The artist has mainly focused on depicting the psychological state of the sitter rather than his physical appearance and status. It is typical of his portraits of that period, to have the half-length figure placed in front of a dark background and fully facing the viewer. The colours chosen are a bit dull with

preference to brown and black tonalities. The main source of light is directed on the man's face and hands. The man posing is unidentified but is surely a Toledan nobleman as he is posing in great dignity. The face of the sitter is a bit elongated a fact that is accentuated by the pointed beard and the receding hairline –as is in the case of the *Man with Hand on his Chest*. The artist uses many techniques in order to show the different textures and materials, such as the grey and black hues on the jacket and the solid white on the collar.

This painting is included as it is a good example of how El Greco illustrated the nobility and how he was chiefly interested in presenting their internal world rather than their external characteristics.

8. *Lady with the Ermine*, 1577-1579
El Greco, 1541-1614
Oil on canvas
63c. high by 50cm. wide
Stirling Maxwell Collection, Glasgow

This painting remained unknown until its revelation in Paris in 1838. The woman depicted was at first thought to be El Greco's daughter. In 1900 Sanpere y Miquel came to the conclusion that it was El Greco's wife: Jeronima de las Cuevas.

Nowadays, both theories have been overruled and the identity of the lady remains unknown. This is one of Greco's finest portraits both in terms of subject matter and style. It represents a woman of style of the period, who is looking out at us in a very direct and self-confident manner. It is, therefore significant as it illustrates how El Greco chose to depict women.

Related works are the *Portrait of Lady* (comparative plate 10) and Cézanne's *Woman with Fur Wrap*.

9. *Fray Hortensio Felix Paravicino*, 1604-9
El Greco, 1541-1614
Oil on canvas
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Paravicino was a scholar and a poet in Toledo, who was a close friend of El Greco's. He wrote four sonnets in which he celebrated the genius of the painter, so El Greco painted this portrait as a gift for him. He was quite a strong character and is depicted here as secure and strong person. He faces out strongly and freely with a sincere look. He is holding a bible in one hand while the other one is resting on the armrest. The model is an artist himself so the painter breaks the wall of alienation for a moment. Paravicino's soul flashes through his eyes, while his blood-red mouth is like an open wound. Underneath the calm surface everything is vibrant even the back line of the armchair which slants sharply.

Related paintings are those of other monks and cardinals such as that of *Don Fernando Niño de Guevara*.

10. *The Burial of the Count of Orgaz*, 1586-8

El Greco, 1541-1614

Oil on canvas

460cm. high by 360cm. wide

Toledo, Church of Santo Tomé

The *Burial of the Count of Orgaz* is one of El Greco's most important paintings. It is situated on a wall in the church of Santo Tomé in Toledo. The painting represents the burial of the Count of Orgaz in 1312, who had restored and enlarged the church in order to be buried in it. When the priests were preparing to bury him St. Stephen and St. Augustine descended from heaven and buried him with their own hands. El Greco was given the contract for the painting in 1586, and had to follow very specific guidelines for its completion. The painting was to be of large scale but placed on a constricted position on the wall of the chapel, which was of modest proportions. Destined to be placed above the tomb, the painting also had to leave space below for a cartouche in which the painted epitaph was to be set. The difficulties involved in the painting were thus considerable; the painting was to be quite big but had to have a semicircular arch-shaped top. These factors, the scale and the difficulty of the work and El Greco's resolution of the problems explain the high valuation given to the picture. This painting is placed in the exhibition not only because it is thought to be

one of El Greco's greatest works, but also because within it are many portraits of people that are also portrayed in individual works.

Related works are the portraits of *Antonio de Covarrubias* along with other portraits of men with beards and elongated faces.

11. *St. Peter and St. Paul*, c.1600

El Greco, 1541-1614

Oil on canvas

118cm. high by 90cm. wide

Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona

This is one of the many paintings of St. Paul and St. Peter. El Greco did many series of the same subject but always included in them a certain change. In this one both saints are wearing their traditional colours -gold and blue for St. Peter and red and green for St. Paul- and bear their symbols, keys for St. Peter and a sword for St. Paul. As El Greco had been an apprentice in a Byzantine workshop he always maintains the traditions when depicting saints. The pair is placed in an open space, while the background consists of a blue sky with some clouds. This particular painting differs from the others with the same subject as it has a unique composition. First of all the pair is nearly never placed in an open space. Secondly, they both have a very strict look on their faces and St. Paul is represented holding his sword by the blade and not holding a book (as is the norm). Another interesting aspect of the painting is the hands of the figures. They are both holding their symbol with their left hand while their right hands are intertwined. The use of fine lines and their elegance make the hands a central part of the composition.

This painting, along with the rest of the paintings of saints, is vital since the representation of the Apostles forms an integral part of El Greco's work.

12. *St. Paul*, c.1580-1586

El Greco, 1541-1614

Oil on canvas

118cm. high by 91cm. wide

Private collection, Madrid

This is the only painting of a single saint placed in an interior which has a background filled with architectural elements. The composition is frugal, as the saint is framed by the architecture behind him. Rectangular blocks of brown colour and a staircase, which leads to a second level, form the structures surrounding him. He is depicted at half-length wearing a pink garment. He is standing behind a table where are placed his book and inkpot –symbolising his intellectuality. On the left of the painting is a sword, another symbol of St. Paul. The face of the saint is bearded and elongated, similarly to the rest of the paintings depicting him.

13. *The Tears of St. Peter*, c.1587-1596

El Greco, 1541-1614

Oil on canvas

97cm. high by 79cm. wide

Museo Soumaya, Mexico

This painting is one of many variations of the same theme. It is one of the earliest versions but contains all the components applied in the latter ones. The saint is here depicted at the opening of a cave and holding the keys, elements evident in most variations. It is included in the exhibition as it is essential for comparison with the other saints and that of the pair.

14. *St. Luke*, c.1605

El Greco, 1541-1614

Oil on Canvas

100cm. high by 76cm. wide

Toledo Cathedral

This painting, which forms part of the Apostles series hanging in the main Sacristy of Toledo Cathedral, is without doubt one of the most perfect of El Greco's paintings from a technical point of view. One is surprised at the inclusion among the Apostles

of an Evangelist who did not know Christ or form part of the Apostolic College; it is surely for this reason that it has often been confused with St. James or St. Bartholomew. The iconography of the Holy painter, who painted the Virgin's portrait according to legend, leaves no room for doubt, gives the miniature of the Virgin on the open book and the brush in the right hand. Probably painted around 1605, like the rest of the series, it is one of the most beautiful. Not only does it have a tense expression of mystical fervour, but also a very rich tonality, with the sumptuous green on the tunic and the blues and reds of the miniature all standing out. The masterly technique puts its authenticity beyond doubt. As often occurs with the representation of the patron saint of painters, one can easily imagine it to be a self-portrait of the artist himself. The suggestion has often been made, though it appears to be contradicted by the apparent age of the saint, substantially younger than the painter's 60-65 years around 1605, the likely date for the canvas on stylistic grounds. Related works are the previous works of saints as well as plate 1, which is an earlier representation of the same person.

15. *Laocoon*, 1606-1610

El Greco, 1541-1614

Oil on Canvas

The National Gallery, Washington D.C.

This painting depicts the incident that occurred before the capture of the city of Troy by the Greeks, when the snakes were sent by Poseidon to kill Laocoon (the priest). The 'Laocoon cult' has had a curious history. Of all sculpture surviving from antiquity, the group in the Vatican has probably given rise to the most admiration and discussion. The perception of its high worth was universal. Michelangelo's admiration, if not actually a determining factor in shaping cultivated opinion, was at least characteristic of the age. Titian was unusual in recovering from his original enthusiasm, while Tintoretto had a copy in his studio.

This picture illustrates the extraordinary nature of El Greco's genius, his strangeness and isolation in the history of European art. Yet, it also proves that in spite of his apathy as an artist, he was extremely receptive to the ideas of his time.

16. *Don Fernando Niño de Guevara*, c.1596-1600
El Greco, 1541-1614
Oil on Panel
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

This magnificent portrait of the cardinal is not one of rigid authority but rather one of insecurity. The whole painting has a rigid division, which is evident by the vertical line starting from the side of the door, going down the cardinal's buttons and ending with the piece of paper on the floor. The left half of the grand figure is obviously tormented while the right one is given more repose. The left hand's fingers are distorted as if pulled violently towards the right, and the folds of the robe are also pulled towards the same direction. His head is framed neither by the wall or the door but is placed in between. The face is sad and intelligent, while the glance seems rude and inquisitive.

It is included in the exhibit for its value in its comparison to earlier portraits like that of *Fray Hortensio Felix Paravicino*, and later ones like that of *Pope Innocent X* by Velasquez.

17. *Charles de Guise*, 1572
El Greco, 1541-1614
Oil on canvas
202cm. high by 117.5cm. wide
Kunsthaus, Zurich

Cardinal Charles de Guise was one of leaders of the Catholic movement during the civil wars in France. So important was his role that he became known as "Il secondo Papa" (the second Pope). In this portrait he is represented seating next to a table looking away and seeming distant. His left hand is holding the armchair, whereas the right is on the table holding a book (many of El Greco's sitters are depicted holding books) symbolising his intellectuality. On the window is a parrot that symbolises the cardinal's ambition of becoming pope: Papagallus = Papa-Gallus = French Pope. Until the 1970s this painting had been attributed to Tintoretto. This painting is,

therefore significant, as it is evidence of the influence Tintoretto had on the artist. This work is, in addition fascinating as it can be linked with the works of Velasquez and other artists of the time who did similar portraits of clergymen.

18. *Pope Innocent X*, c.1650
Diego Velasquez, 1599-1660
Oil on canvas

This portrait of Velasquez is a fine example of the painter's ability to do portraits of royals and of the high clergy. After having stayed in Spain for several years the artist decided to go to Italy and show-off his talent. In the portrait he did of the pope he put all of his skill in order to show Rome how brilliant he could be. To start with, he used vibrant colours clashing the pope's high colour with his red cape. The silken texture of the cape itself is magnificent and so is the rendering of his robe.

This painting is included in the exhibition because it conveys the general attitude of Spain, and the surroundings in which El Greco worked. It is also a part of the 'pope series' and helps us examine the transformation of style from El Greco to the present day.

19. *Study after Velasquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X*, 1954
Francis Bacon, 1909-
Oil on canvas
Private collection

Francis Bacon did his first important series of paintings around 1950 beginning with the variations on Velasquez's *Portrait of Pope Innocent X*. Bacon's distorted and idiosyncratic images bear eloquent witness to the actual events of the post-war and period and more generally to man's innate capacity for violence. For him pain and suffering are irremediable, inseparable from individual consciousness and the human condition. In the portrait, the pope looks as if he has lost his legs or is going through the process of rehabilitation. He is by turns resigned and petulant, slumped in a posture of complete regression.

Compared to the previous portraits one can see the extent to which an artist can take a pre-existing theme and create an image filled with emotion and symbolism.

20. *El Greco's Self-Portrait*, Athens 1990

Manolis Polimeris

Oil on canvas

Private collection

Polimeris is a Modern Greek artist who has studied the work of El Greco at great length. He is fully aware of the impact El Greco made on further generations and decided to pay tribute to him by creating a series of paintings based on his work. This painting is based on El Greco's *Self-portrait* (plate 3). The artist has included the main elements of the previous painting but has created a different composition, which goes to the limit of abstraction.

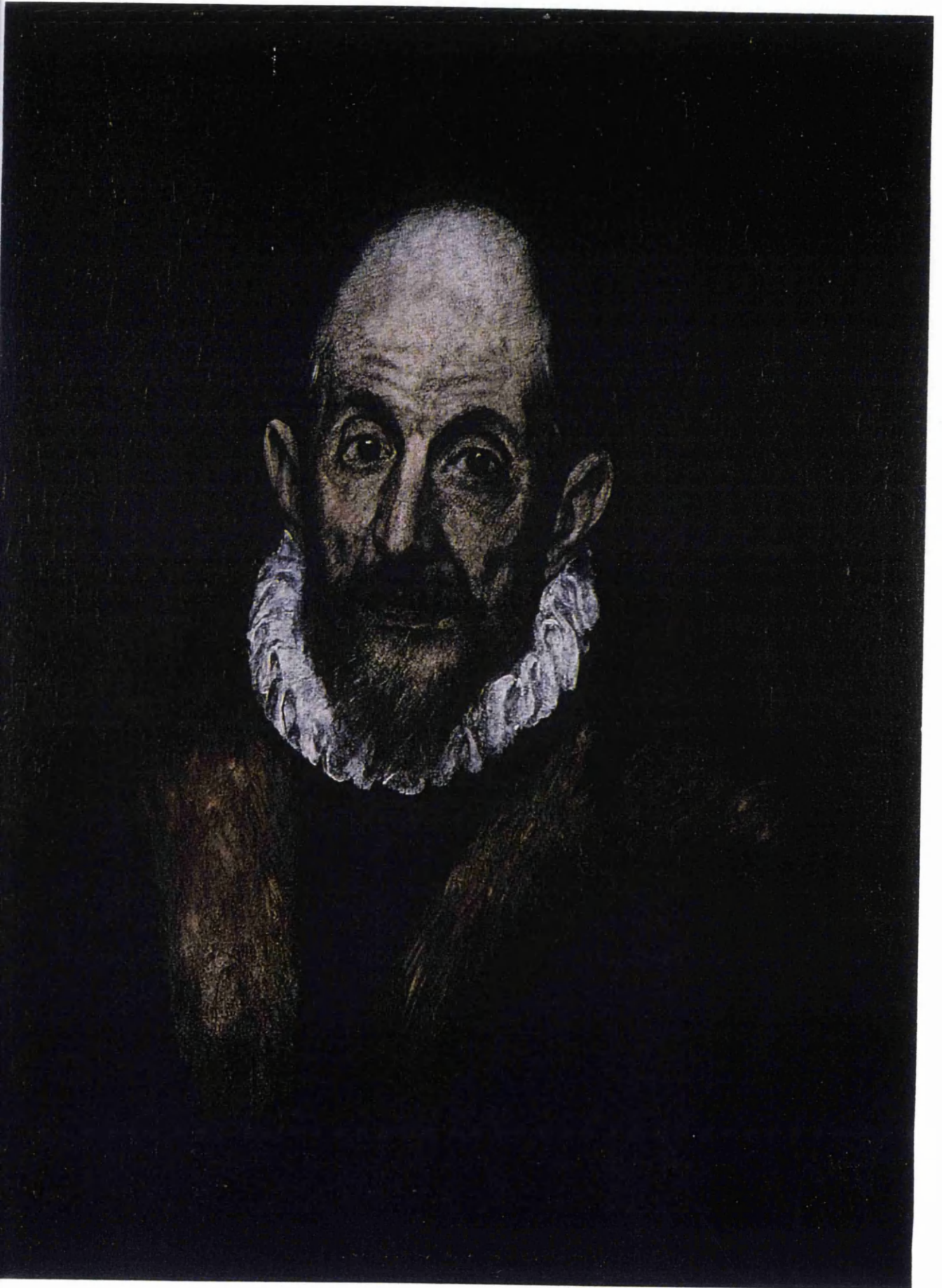
This work was chosen as the last piece of the exhibition so as to remind the viewer that El Greco was a grand portraiture painter who stirred artists from the 1600s to our day.

Colour Plates

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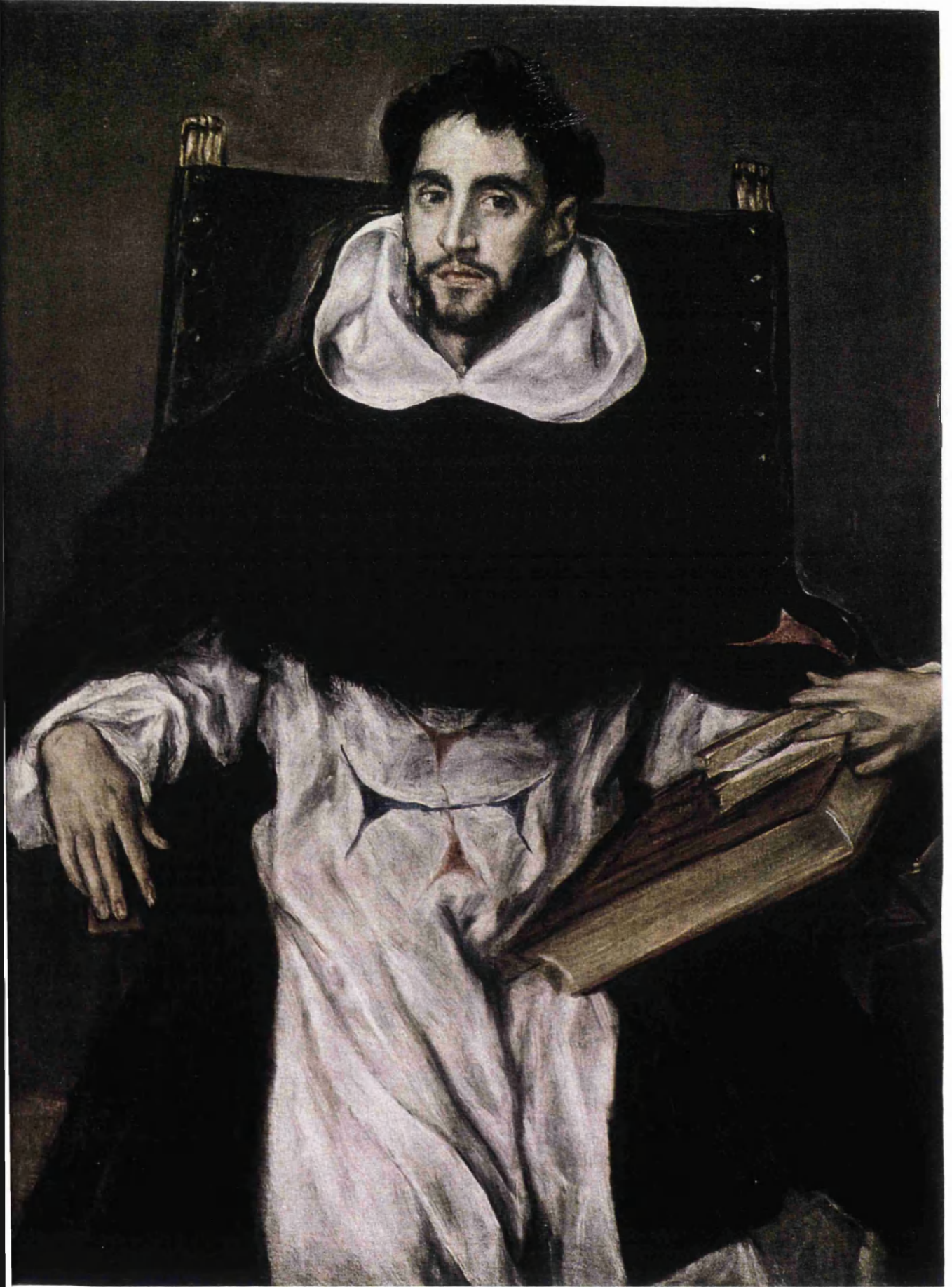




7.











12.











17.









List of Comparative Works

1. Post-Byzantine icon, *Virgin "Odigitria"*, c.15th century
Unknown artist
Oil on panel
Mytilene

2. *Portrait of a Man*, 1508-1512
Titian, c.1490-1576
Oil on canvas
133cm. high by 82cm. wide
National Gallery, London

3. *Self-Portrait*, c.1570
Titian, c.1490-1576
Oil on canvas
86cm. high by 65cm. wide
The Prado, Madrid

4. *Penitent Magdalene*
Titian, c.1490-1576
Oil on canvas
Pitti Palace, Florence

5. *The Cleansing of the Temple*, 1570-1573
El Greco, 1541-1614
Oil on canvas
The Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Minnesota

6. *Boy with guitar*
Caravaggio, 1583-1610
Oil on canvas
110cm. high by 81cm. wide

National Gallery, Munich

7. *Jacopo Sansovino*
Jacopo Tintoretto, 1518-1594
Oil on canvas

8. *Madonna with the Long Neck, c. 1535*
Parmigianino, 1503-1540
Oil on canvas
The Uffizi, Florence

9. *Coronation of the Virgin, 1591-2*
El Greco, 1541-1614
Oil on canvas
99cm. high by 101cm. wide
The Prado, Madrid

10. *The Merciful Virgin, c.1603-1605*
El Greco, 1541-1614
Oil on canvas
184cm. high by 124cm. wide
Fundación Hospital de Nuestra Señora de la Caridad, Illescas

11. *Portrait of an Elderly Gentleman, 1586-1597*
El Greco, 1541-1614
Signed on lower right
Oil on canvas
44cm. high by 42cm. wide
The Prado, Madrid

12. *St. Louis, King of France, c.1586-94*
El Greco, 1541-1614
Oil on canvas
The Louvre, Paris

13. *Prince Don Carlos*, 1559
Alonso Sánchez Coello, 1532-88
Oil on canvas
109cm. high by 95cm. wide
The Prado, Madrid

14. *Portrait of a Lady*, 1578-81
El Greco, 1541-1614
Oil on canvas
John G. Johnson Collection, Philadelphia Museum of Art

15. *Diego de Covarrubias*,
El Greco, 1541-1614
Oil on canvas
House of El Greco, Toledo

16. *The Governors of the Old Men's Almshouse at Haarlem*, 1664
Frans Hals, 1580-1666
Oil on canvas
Frans Halsmuseum, Haarlem

17. *The Night Watch*, 1642
Rembrandt, 1606-1669
Oil on canvas
Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

18. *The Pesaro Madonna*, 1519-1526
Titian, c.1490-1576
Oil on canvas
478cm. high by 266cm. wide
Church of St. Maria dei Frari, Venice

19. *The Burial of the Count of Orgaz* (detail of kneeling boy), 1586,
El Greco, 1541-1614
Oil on canvas
460cm. high by 360cm. wide
Toledo, Church of Santo Tomé

20. *The Burial of the Count of Orgaz* (detail of bearded man), 1586
El Greco, 1541-1614
Oil on canvas
460cm. high by 360cm. wide
Toledo, Church of Santo Tomé

21. *Antonio de Covarrubias*, c.1600-1605
El Greco, 1541-1614
Oil on canvas
68cm. high by 57cm. wide
Museum of El Greco, Toledo

22. *The Burial of the Count of Orgaz* (detail of man), 1586,
El Greco, 1541-1614
Oil on canvas
460cm. high by 360cm. wide
Toledo, Church of Santo Tomé

23. *The Burial of the Count of Orgaz* (detail of priests), 1586,
El Greco, 1541-1614
Oil on canvas
460cm. high by 360cm. wide
Toledo, Church of Santo Tomé

24. *The Burial of the Count of Orgaz* (detail of group of men), 1586,
El Greco, 1541-1614
Oil on canvas
460cm. high by 360cm. wide

Toledo, Church of Santo Tomé

25. *St. Paul and St. Peter*, c.1607
El Greco, 1541-1614
Oil on canvas
123cm. high by 92cm. wide
Nationalmuseum, Stockholm

26. *St. Peter and St. Paul* (detail of head of St. Paul), c.1600
El Greco, 1541-1614
Oil on canvas
118cm. high by 90cm. wide
Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona

27. *The Saint Scarf*, c.1587-1596
El Greco, 1541-1614
Oil on canvas
71cm. high by 54cm. wide
The Prado, Madrid

28. *Laocoon* (detail of head of Laocoon), 1606-1610
El Greco, 1541-1614
Oil on canvas
The National Gallery, Washington D.C.

29. *The tears of Saint Peter*, c.1580-1586
El Greco, 1541-1614
Oil on canvas
108cm. high by 89.6cm. wide
The Josephine and John Bowes Museum, County of Durham

30. *El Espolio* (detail of head of Christ), c.1580-1585
El Greco, 1541-1614
Oil on canvas

165cm. high by 99cm. wide

Toledo Cathedral

31. *Pope Paul III and His Grandsons Alessandro and Ottavio Farnese*, 1546

Titian, c.1490-1576

Oil on canvas

32. *La femme à la Fourrure*, c.1880

Paul Cézanne, 1839-1906

Oil on canvas

Private collection

33. *Portrait of a Cardinal*, 1989

Manolis Polimeris

Oil on canvas

Private collection

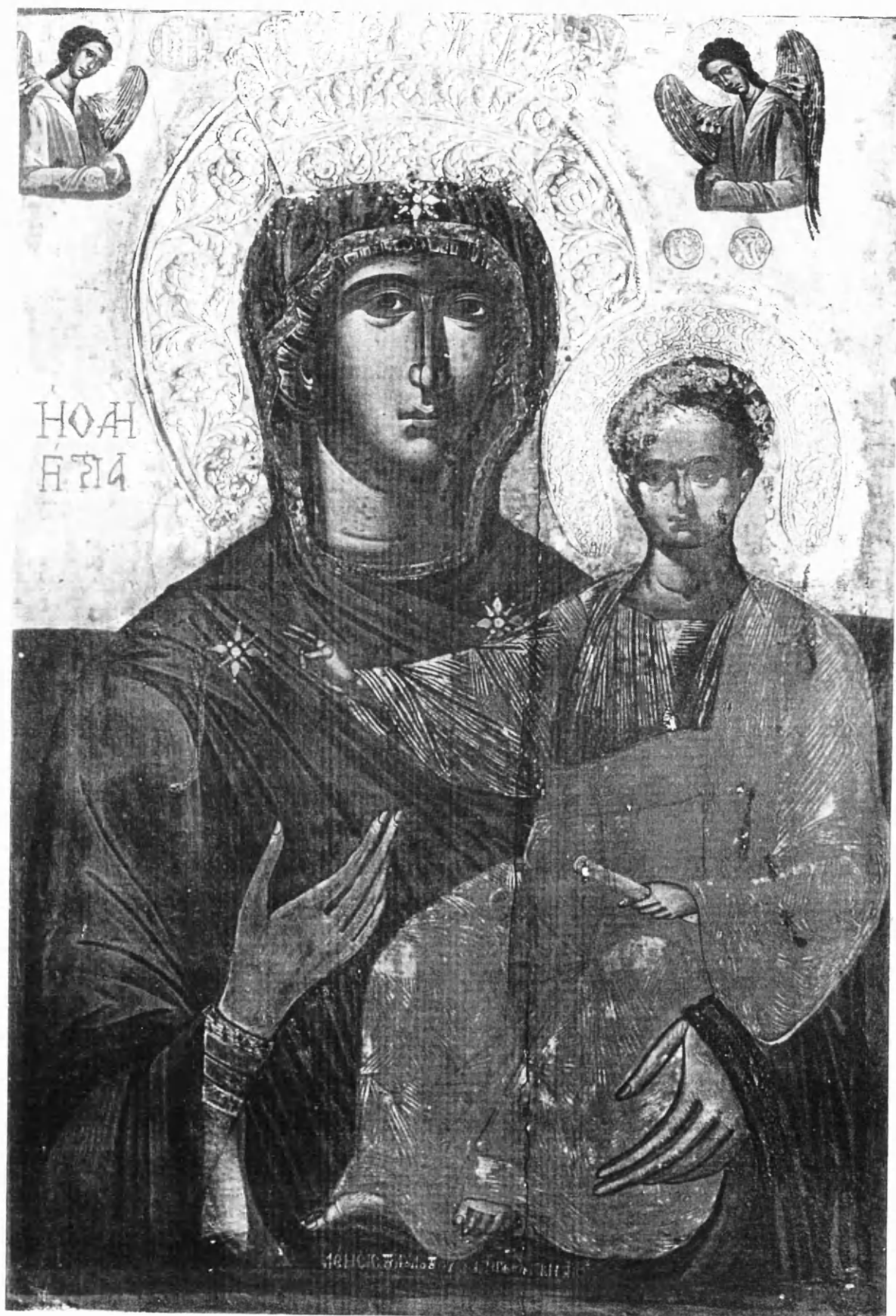
34. *The Laocoon*, 1990

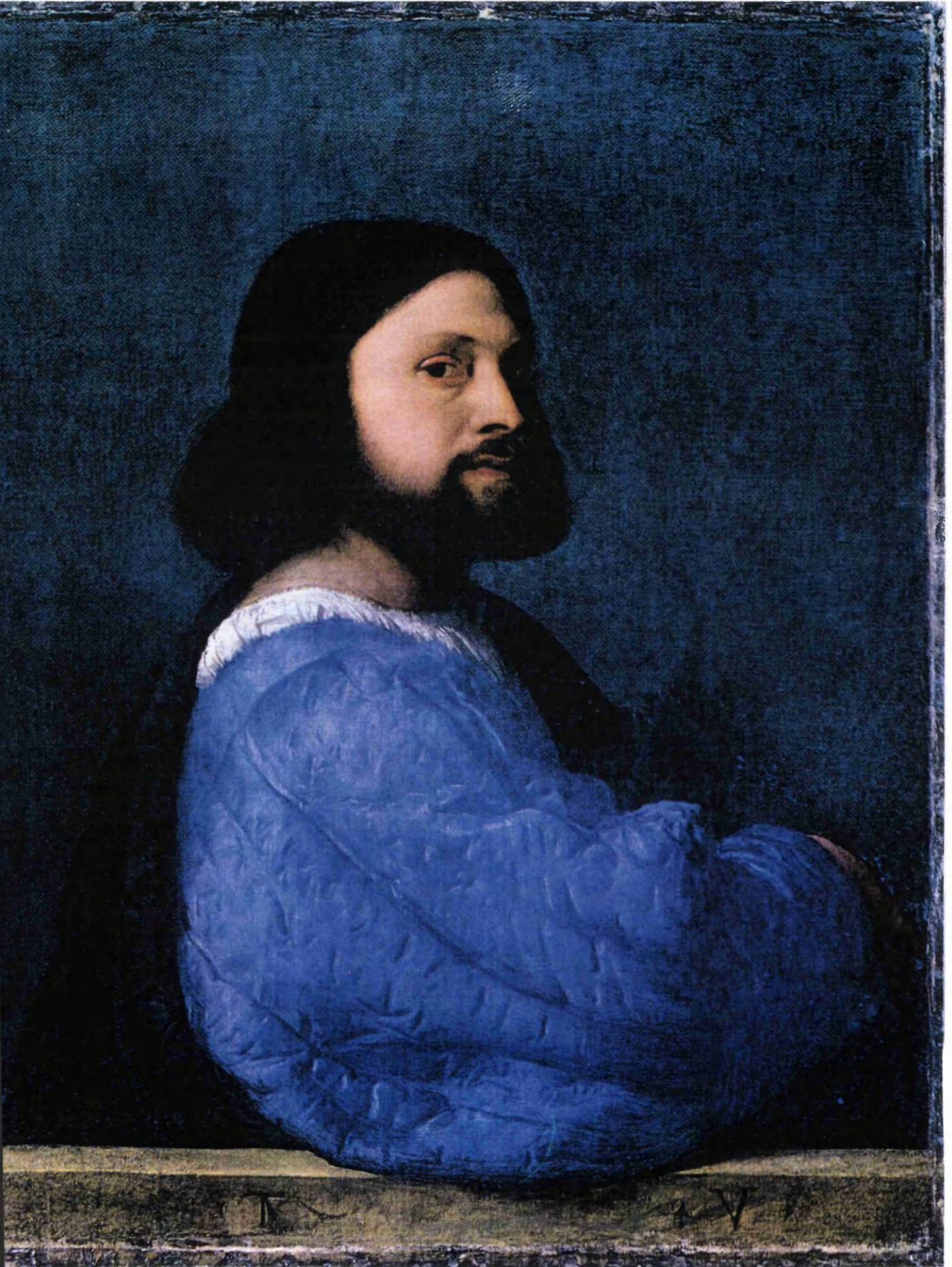
Manolis Polimeris

Oil on canvas

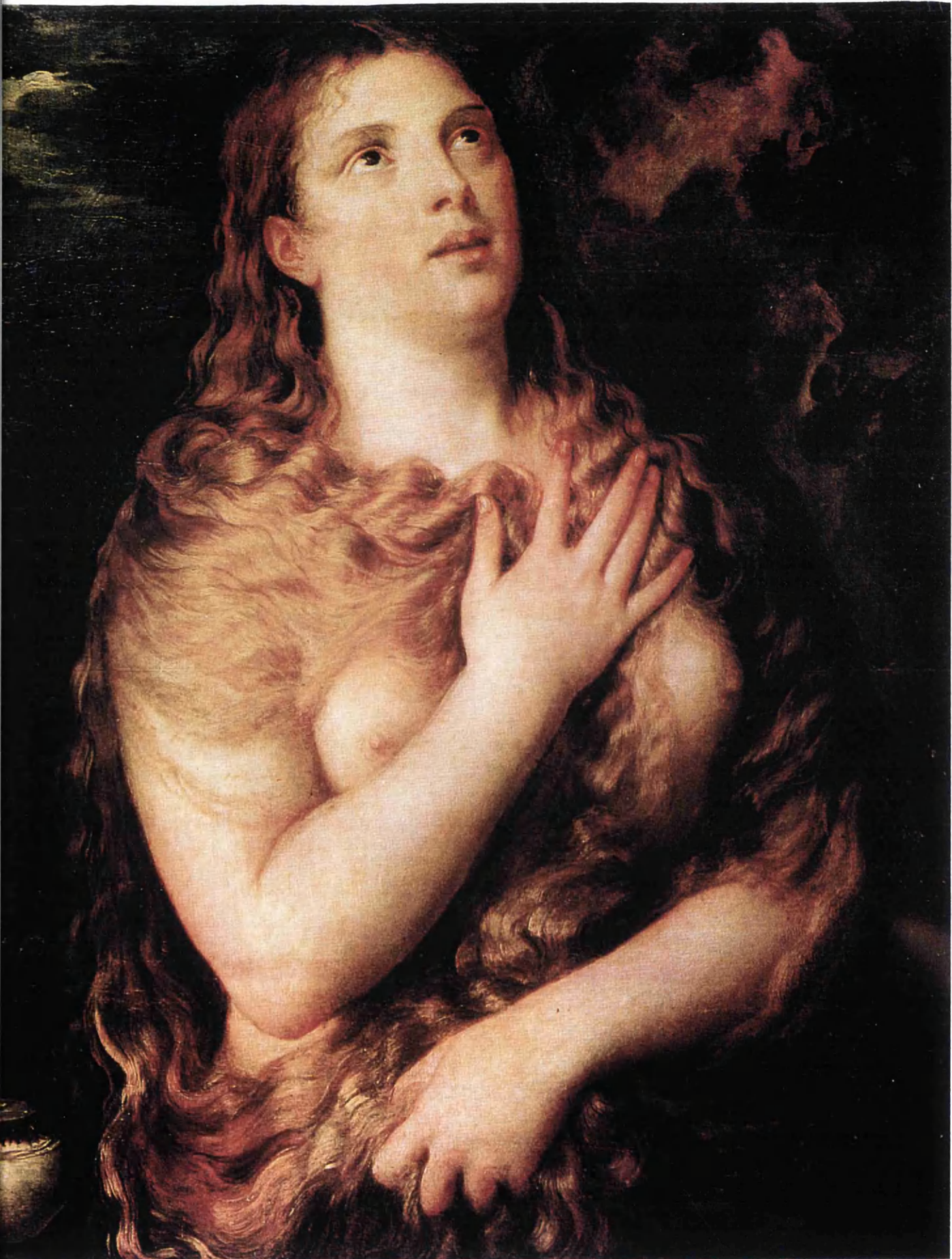
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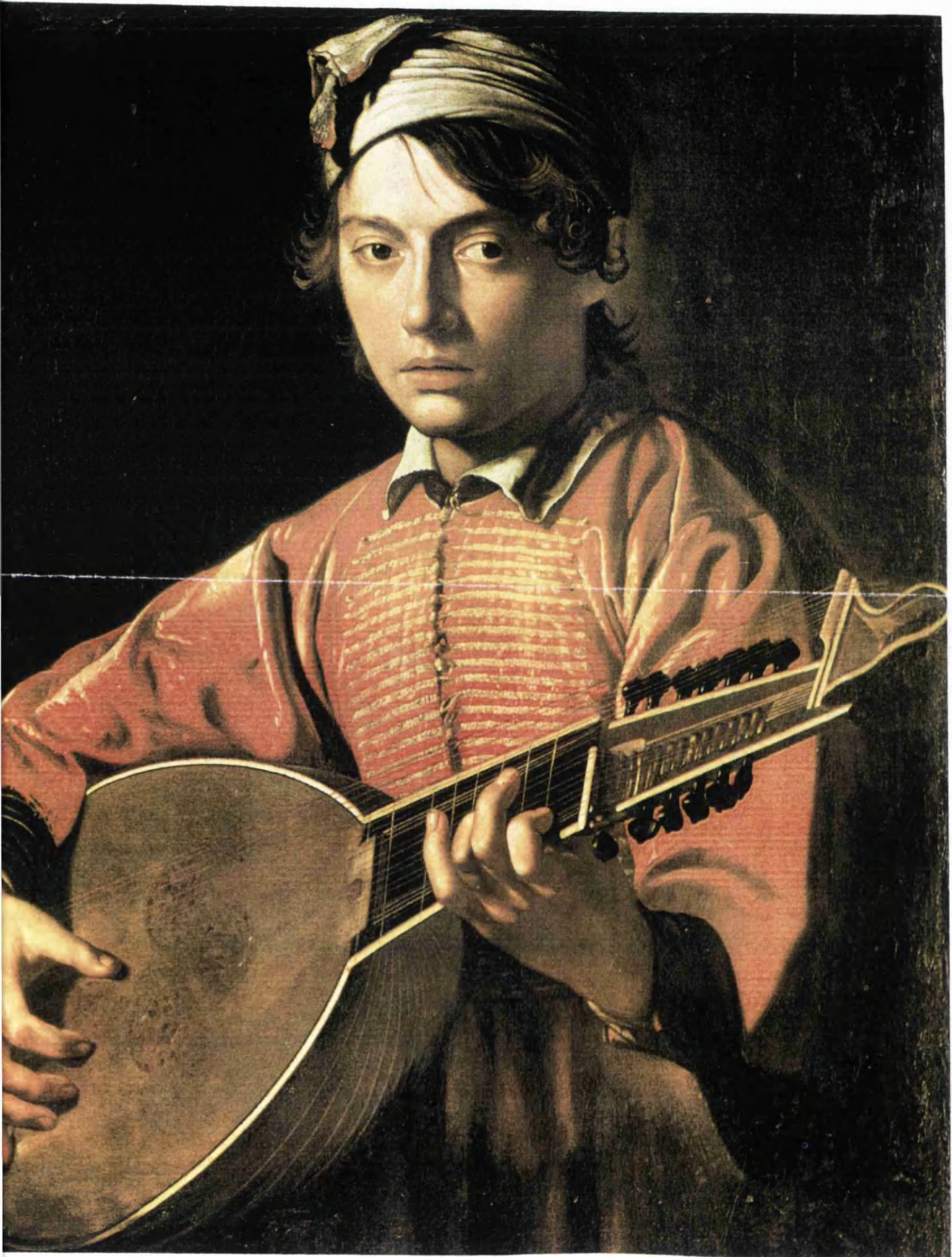


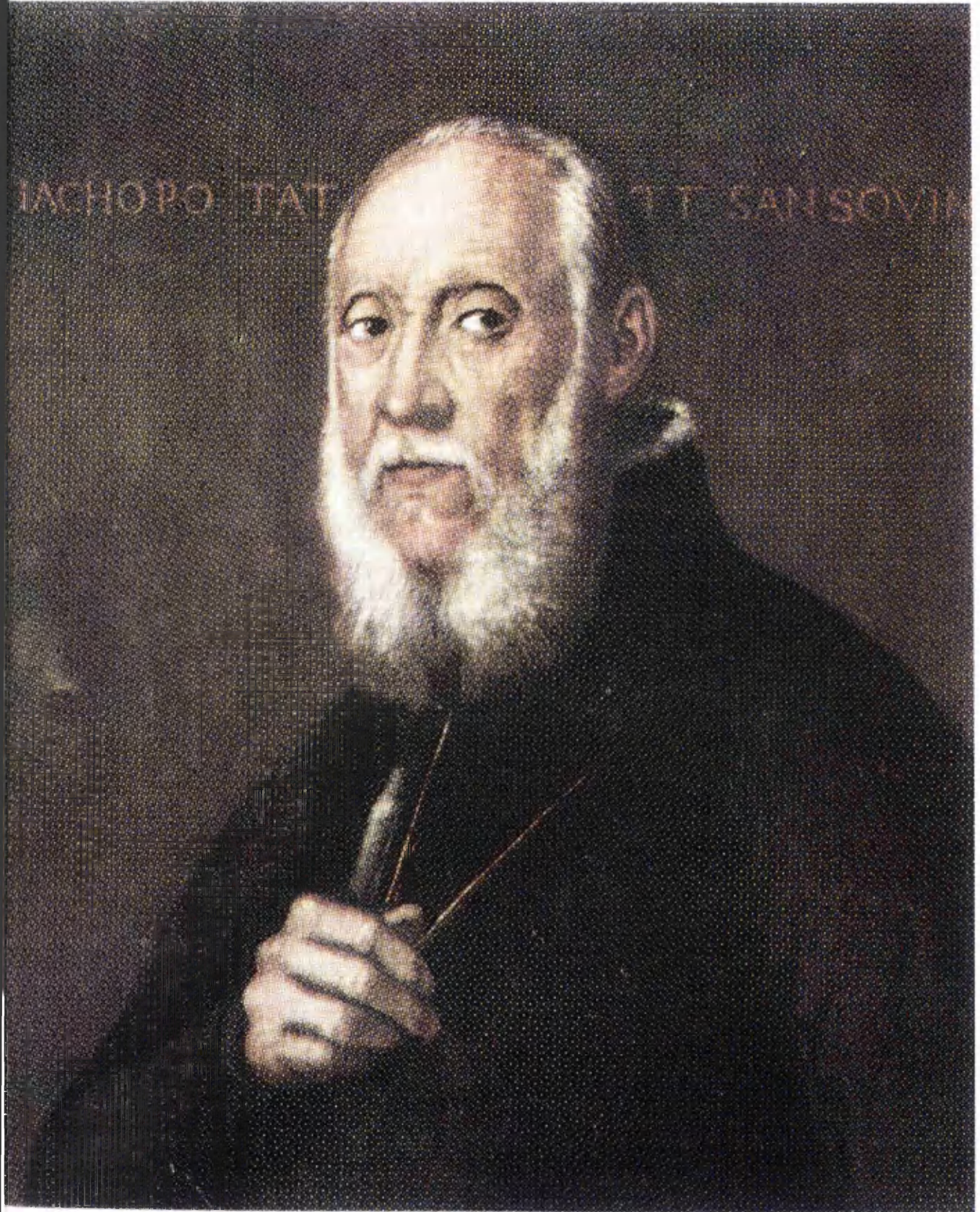


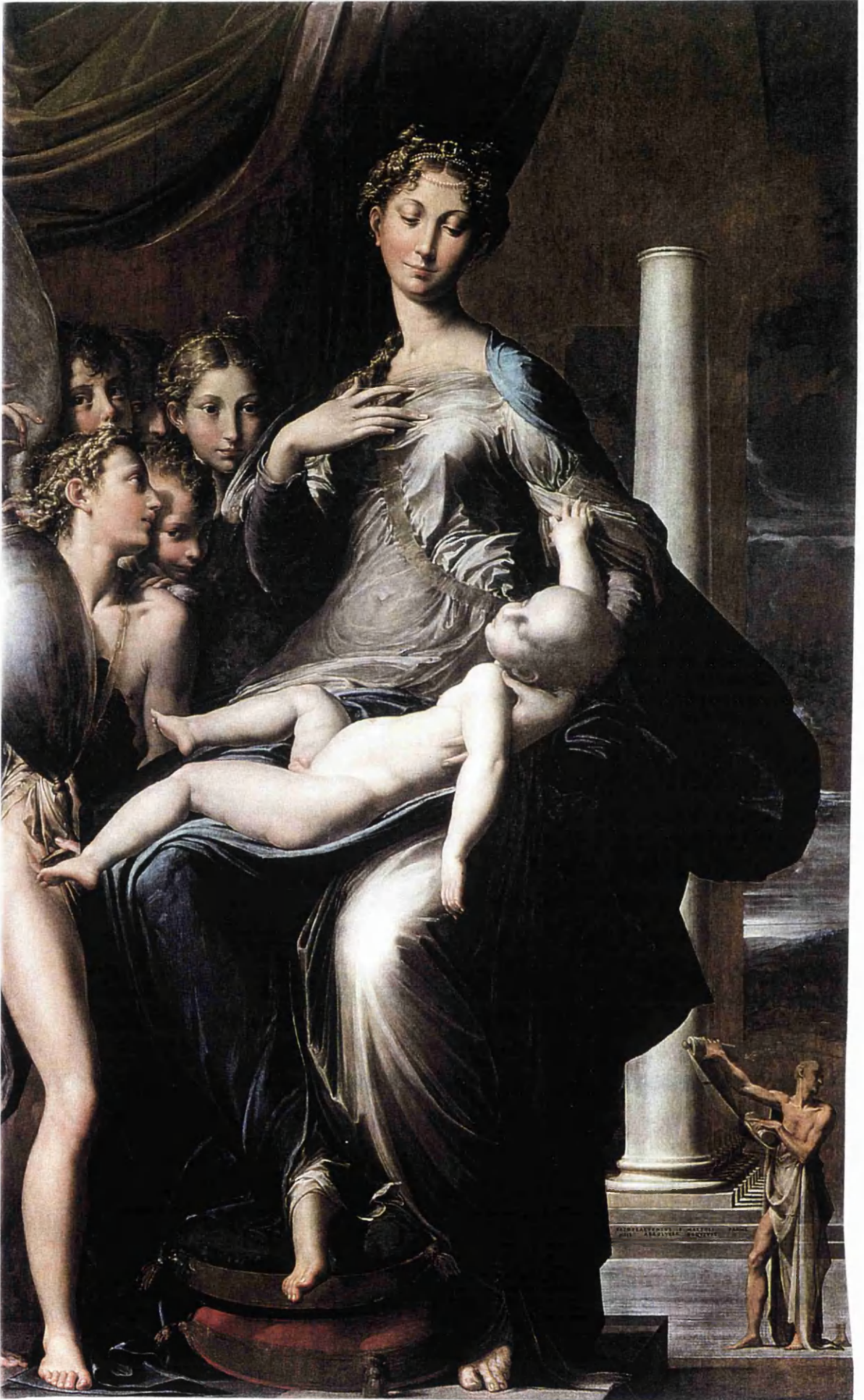
























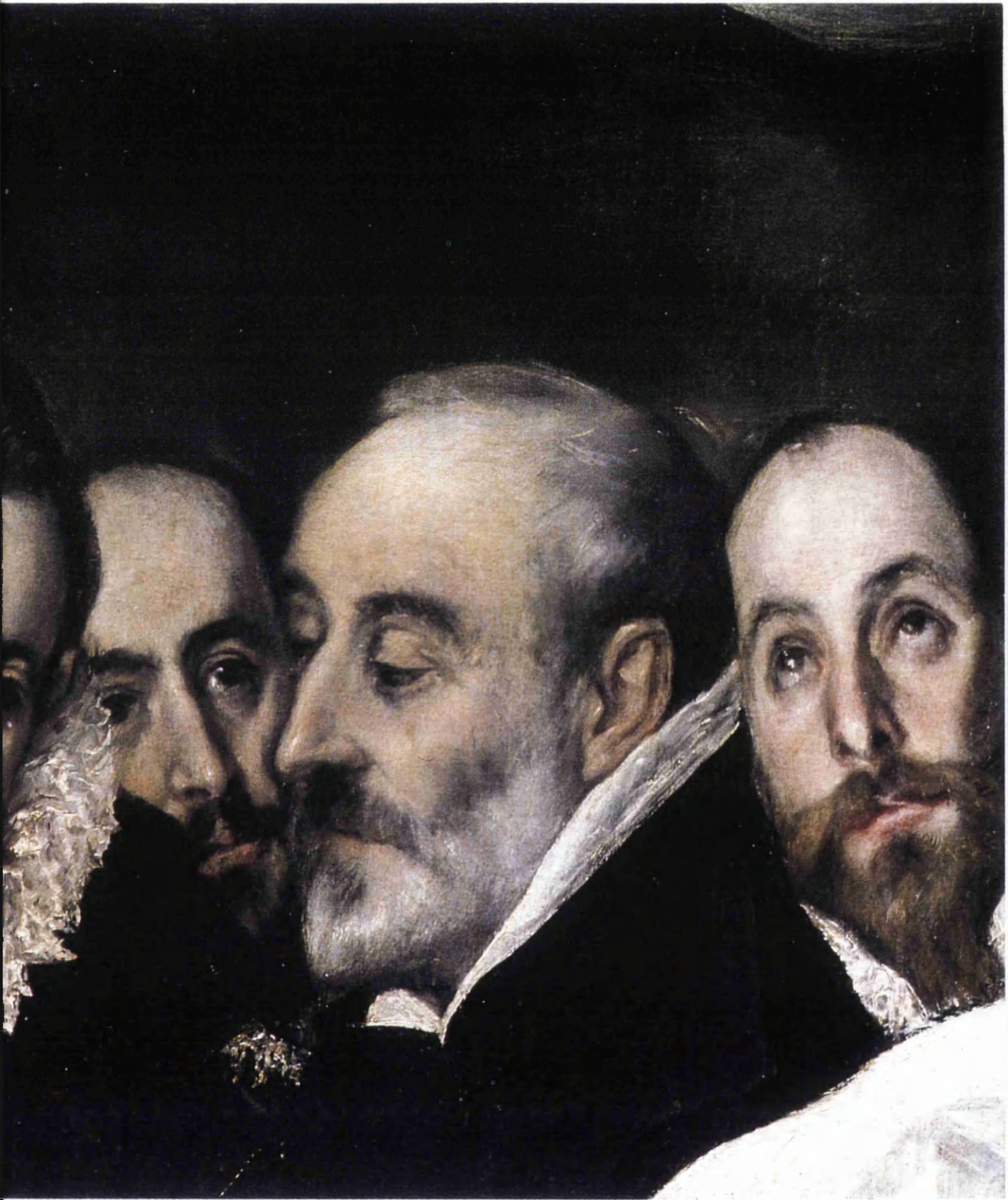












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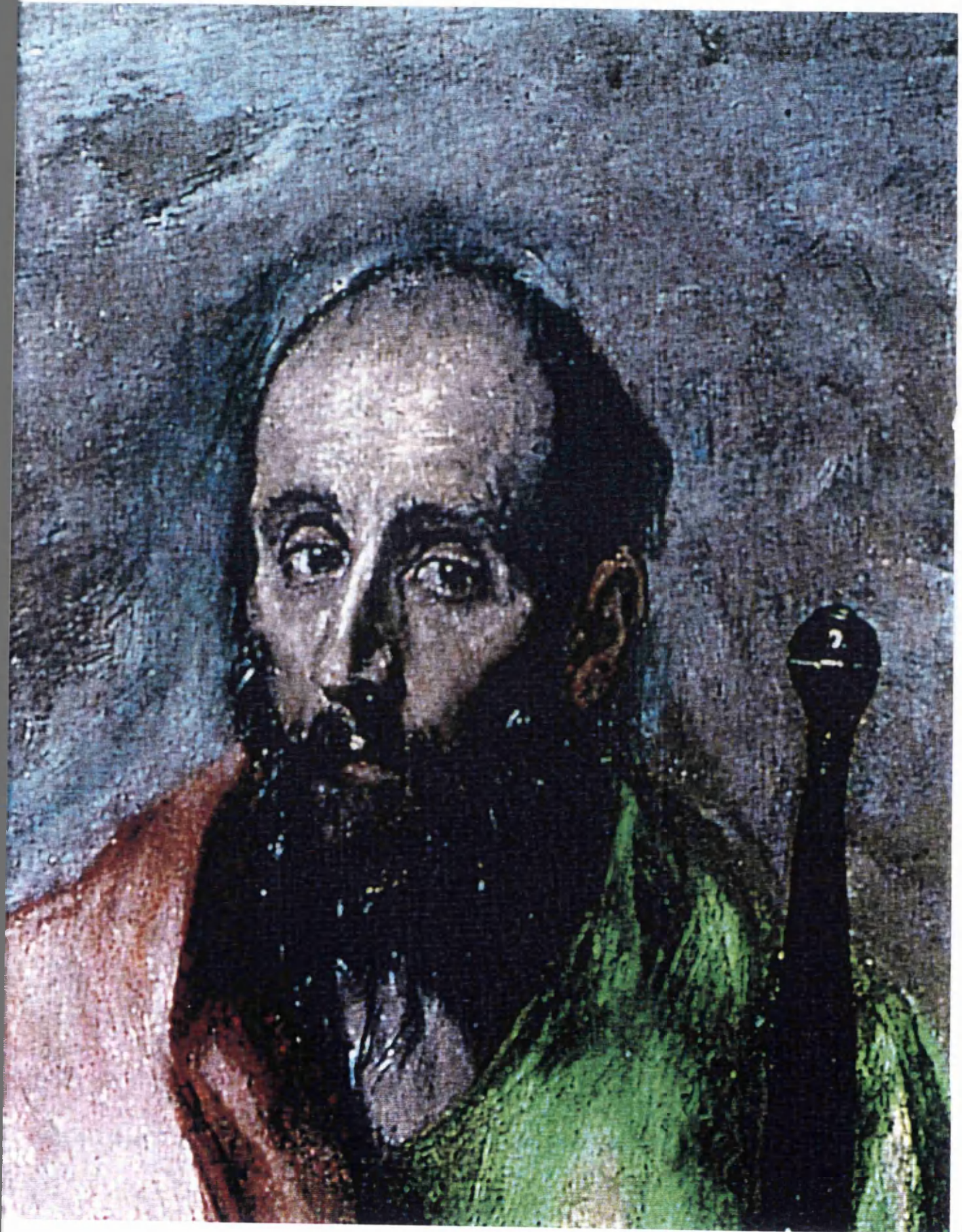


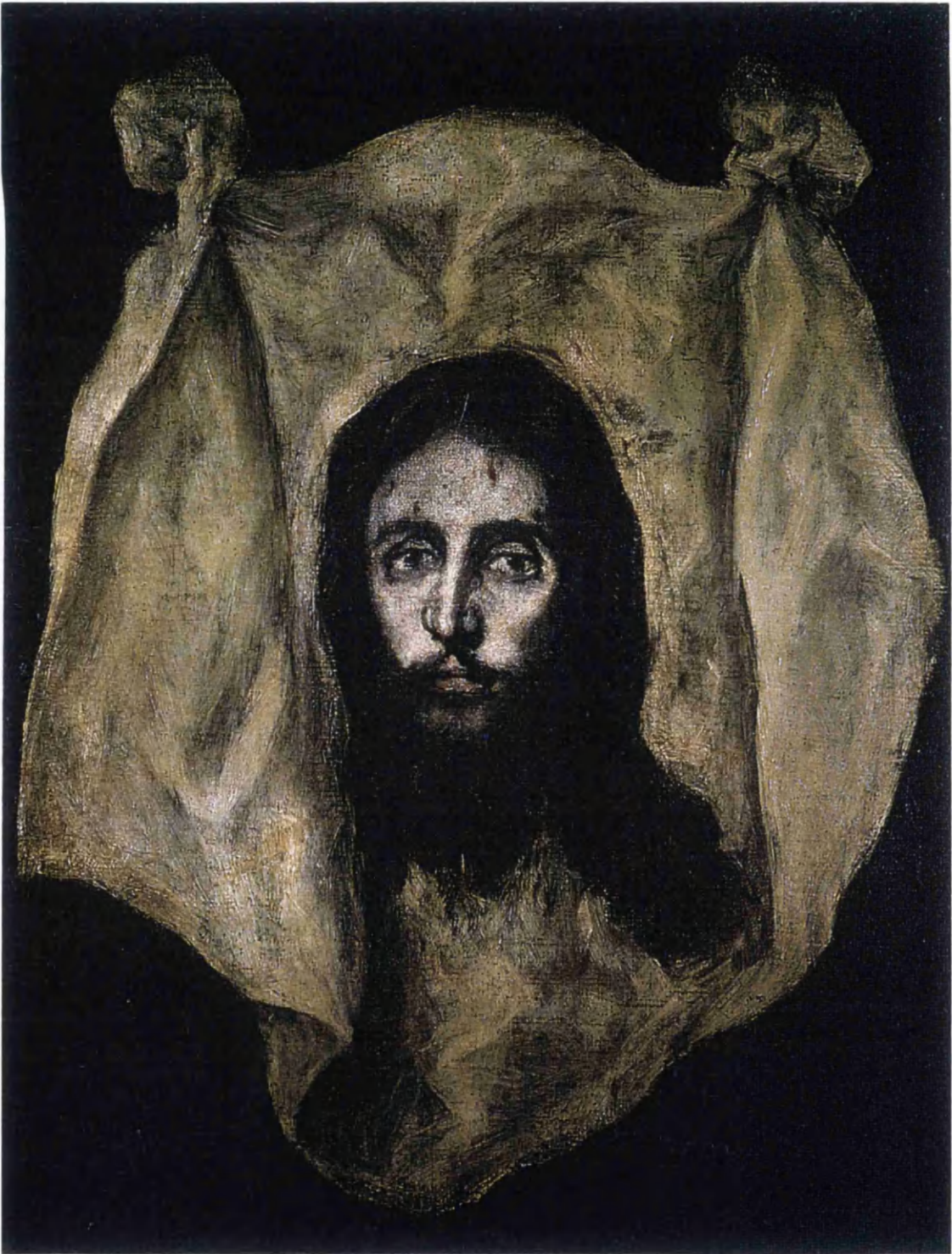




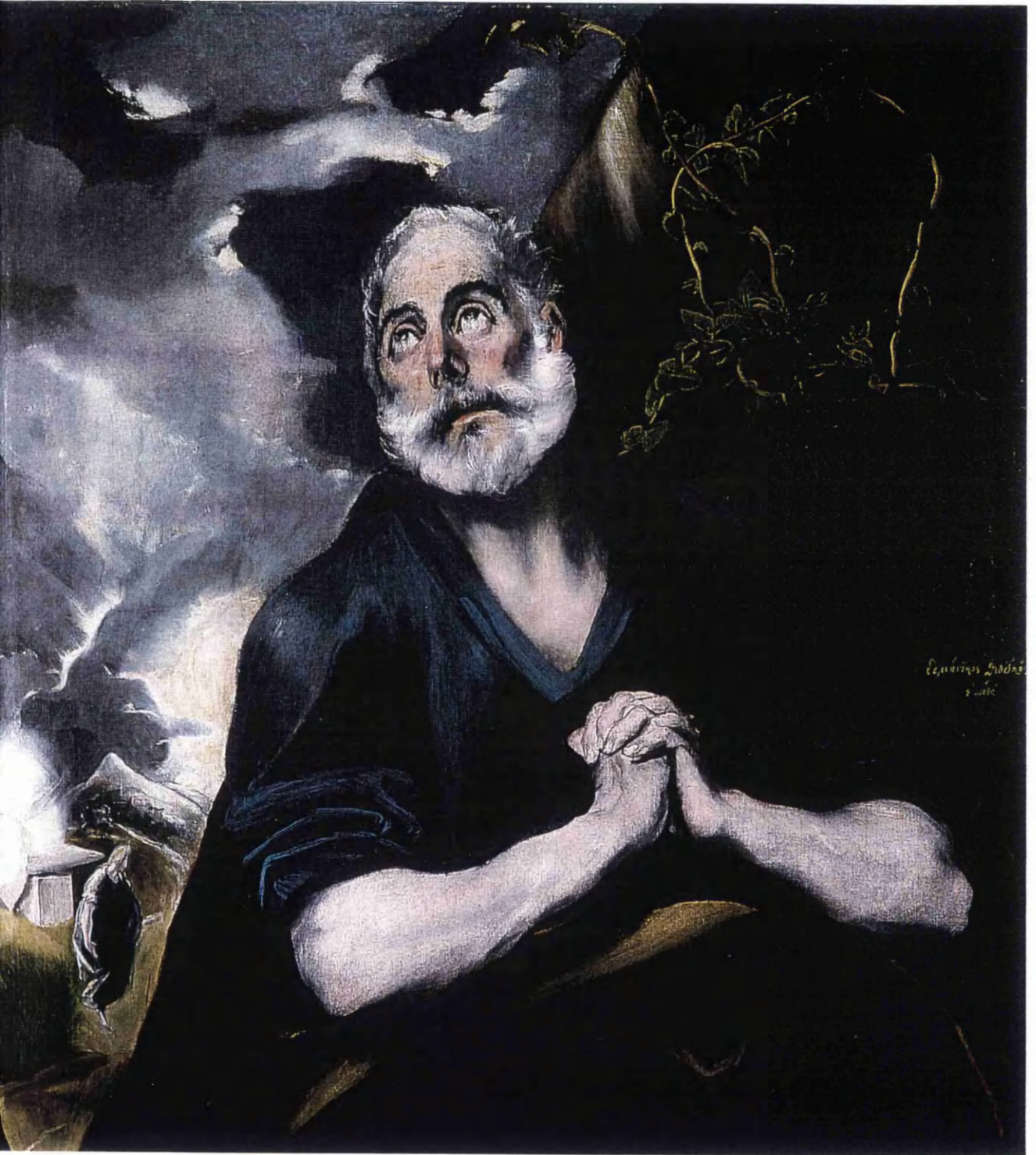






















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