

THE YOUNG MURILLO EXHIBITION

19th October 2009 – 17th January 2010

The Bilbao Fine Arts Museum, BBK Hall

Sponsored by BBK

Co-produced in collaboration with the Museum of Fine Arts, Seville. The Department for Culture of the Local Government Council of Andalusia.

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Around 1645, Murillo experienced his first artistic successes and began an upwards career that dethroned Francisco de Zurbarán from his lead as the most admired painter on the respected artistic scene in Seville. It was during this first period that the fundamental elements of Murillo's personal way of depicting religious subjects in such a way that they appealed directly to the emotions of the people contemplating his paintings first appeared.

Back then, the influence of *Masters* of the previous generation such as Herrera, the Elder, Zurbarán and Ribera can be seen in the immediate realism of his subjects, his masterly studies of light and luminous contrasts and his way of observing things, opting as he did for Realism and naturalistic transformation along the lines of the engravings of Dutchman Abraham Bloemaert.

The Young Murillo gathers together 42 works executed by the young Bartolomé E. Murillo (Seville, 1617-1682) in one great exhibition. Up until now, this particular period in Murillo's life has been studied very little indeed. The period was, however, absolutely crucial in his artistic career since it established the orientation of his later works, something that may also be observed in some of the other paintings forming part of this exhibition. The Fine Arts Museums of both Bilbao and Seville, Co-producers of this exhibition, house several outstanding examples of Murillo's work dating from the periods when he was training as a painter and his later, early adult years: *San Pedro en lágrimas (St. Peter in Tears)* (c. 1650 -1655) and *San Lesmes (St. Lesmes)* (c. 1655) in the Museum in Bilbao and *Estigmatización de San Francisco (St. Francis Receiving the Stigmata)* (c.1650) and *San Jerónimo penitente (Penitent St. Jerome)* (c. 1665) in Seville. The museum project undertaken by Alfonso E. Pérez Sánchez and Benito Navarrete is the result of an exhaustive research process that intended to throw some light on the scant 15 years (from 1640 till 1655) during which Murillo trained as a painter.

The most well-known works of the *Master* from Seville belong to his adult period when the so-called "estilo vaporoso" ("vaporous style") was more evident in his works as the result of the Baroque period being at its height. The works, executed when Murillo was aged from 23 to 38 on the other hand, display an evident realism and clearly contain some of the elements that were to make up his characteristic way of interpreting religious themes and the formal components upon which his artistic language was later founded. In spite of their artistic value

and their tremendous interest within the context of the period, the works have never been studied as a whole until now. They are canvasses that reflect the impact that literature from the Spanish Golden Age had on Murillo, particularly his interpretation of the book *Guzmán de Alfarache* by Mateo Alemán and his sensitivity regarding the social problems of the period. This book, a copy of which Murillo kept in his library, had been published in Seville in 1602.

We can therefore say that the exhibition covers Murillo's training period, his contact with early naturalism and his identification with the doctrines of social justice preached by the Franciscans. It is also the very first time that the painter's work is contextualised within a cultural and sociological framework.

In order to prepare this exhibition, we have been given important loans by some extremely important international museums and private collections whose collaboration has allowed us to group together the almost 50 works comprising this exhibition, many of which are being exhibited to the general public for the very first time. We would like to express our particular gratitude to the following institutions: The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, The National Museum of Stockholm, The North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh (USA), The Bonnat Museum, Bayonne (France), Patrimonio Nacional (National Heritage), Madrid, The Louvre Museum, Paris, The Alte Pinakothek, Munich, The Detroit Institute of Arts, The Palazzo Bianco of Geneva, The Goya Museum, Castres, The Prado Museum, Madrid, The Museum of Arte Antiga, Lisbon, The National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin and The Mie Prefectural Art Museum, Japan, amongst others.

The exhibition catalogue is intended as an international reference work within the artistic historiography regarding Murillo. For this reason, several different specialists were invited to submit their texts and comments, amongst which figure: Benito Navarrete, Alfonso Pérez Sánchez, Ignacio Cano, Odile Delenda, Enrique Valdivielso and Karin Hellwig.

First Works

From 1640 to 1655, Murillo was but a young painter who had recently abandoned the workshop of his *Master*, Juan del Castillo, and was soaking up the Naturalist tradition in his home town of Seville. Murillo opted for a language that combined the tradition inherited from Herrera, the Elder and Zurbarán with the invigorating new sources of Dutch and Flemish Mannerism. At the beginning of the XVII century, Seville was a prosperous and cosmopolitan city, a thriving marketplace for engravings, a doorway to the Indies and the headquarters of collectors of paintings and numerous religious orders. Despite the fact that Seville began its decline towards the middle of the century, Murillo enjoyed a successful career there. He hardly left the city in his entire lifetime, except for a hypothetical journey to the Indies and a possible trip to Madrid in 1642 during which he met Velázquez. Neither of these journeys, however, have

been fully corroborated documentarily. His trip to the Spanish royal court in 1658, however, is fully documented.

In addition to the painting entitled *Autorretrato (Self-portrait)* that belongs to a New York private collection, the first hall of the exhibition also holds some of the painter's first works: *La Virgen entregando el rosario a Santo Domingo (St. Dominic Receiving the Rosary from the Virgin Mary)* from the Archdiocese of Seville, *La Virgen con fray Lauterio, San Francisco y Santo Tomás (Virgin Mary with Brother Lauterio and Saints Francis and Thomas)* from the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, and *Las dos Trinidades (The Two Trinities)* from the National Museum of Stockholm. In all of these paintings, we can observe the influence that Italian and Dutch models of art on Murillo who had familiarised himself with both styles thanks to the engravings he had seen. The debt Murillo had with his *Master*, Juan del Castillo, the Flemish painter, Juan de Roelas, who lived in Seville and the sculpted reliefs of Juan Martínez Montañés can also be observed.

El Claustro Chico (*The Small Cloister*)

The next hall houses six of the paintings comprising Murillo's first important commissioned work in Seville for the very first time: these are the paintings he executed for the Claustro Chico or "Small Cloister" of the convent of Saint Francis which has since disappeared. Thanks to this group of paintings, Murillo's reputation as a great artist grew since his paintings, hung as they were in a public place, were seen by the general public. Back then, the bustling Square of Saint Francis was the social hub of the city. The cloister in which Franciscan monks extolled their ideals regarding the poverty and charity illustrated by the miracles depicted in the canvasses was located behind the archway of the Town Hall. *San Francisco confortado por el ángel (St. Francis Comforted by an Angel)* and *San Diego de Alcalá dando de comer a los pobres (St. James of Alcalá Feeding the Poor)*, both from the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, San Fernando, *El beato fray Gil en éxtasis delante de Gregorio IX (Blessed Brother Giles in Ecstasy before Pope Gregory IX)* from the North Carolina Museum of Art, Raleigh (EE.UU.), *San Diego de Alcalá en éxtasis ante la Cruz (St. James of Alcalá in Ecstasy before the Cross)* from the Museum of the Agustín Order of Toulouse, *San Salvador de Horta y el inquisidor de Aragón (St. Salvator of Horta and the Inquisitor of Aragón)* from the Bonnat Museum, Bayonne and *San Francisco Solano y el toro (St. Francis Solano and the Bull)*, deposited by the National Heritage in the Alcázar of Seville, all represent the definitive consecration of the artist whilst clearly demonstrating his artistic achievements at a date as early as 1645.

Social Awareness

As a result of his relationship with the Franciscan monks of the above-mentioned monastery, Murillo developed a social awareness that led to his painting works dedicated to the abandoned and the child beggars, thus leading to his participating in the social debate of the period that

arose as the result of the ideals of Dr. Pérez de Herrera and his book entitled *Amparo de pobres (Shelter for the Poor)*. This atmosphere reflected in the picaresque literature of the book "*Guzmán de Alfarache*" by Mateo Alemán sparked his awareness regarding the wretched and the destitute. ***Joven Mendigo (Young Beggar)*** from the Louvre Museum, ***Vieja con gallo y cesta de huevos (Old Woman with a Rooster and Basket of Eggs)*** and ***Dos muchachos comiendo melón y uvas (Two Boys Eating Melon and Grapes)***, both from the Alte Pinakothek, Munich, ***La Vieja gitana con niño (Old Gypsy Woman with Boy)*** from the Wallraf-Richartz Museum-Foundation Corboud, Cologne, and ***Vieja hilandera (Old Woman with a Distaff)***, kept in The Hoare Collection, Wiltshire, Stourhead (United Kingdom), which this exhibition confirms as being the original period of this celebrated composition, are all acknowledged as being great masterworks of this period.

These canvasses -in which we may observe the influence of Caravaggio, Ribera, Velázquez and the Dutch school of painting- are outstanding loans made to us by those institutions to which these paintings belong. They make up a truly unique group here. The profane subject matters reflected in them was to materialise later in Murillo's ideology. Here, however, subject matters are treated without hiding even the most emaciated and miserable aspects of the daily reality of a city in which begging formed part of life and whose social ambience profoundly moved the sensitivity of the painter.

The Childhood of Christ

The next section is dedicated to the childhood of Christ in which the ability Murillo has to incorporate objects from daily life into religious iconography becomes particularly patent.

Special mention must be made of the fact that we can see the two versions that Murillo painted of the subject ***Huida a Egipto (Flight into Egypt)*** for the very first time together: one has been loaned to us by The Detroit Institute of Arts and the other by the Palazzo Bianco, Geneva. The same occurs with the different representations of the subject ***La Virgen con el Niño (Virgin and Child)*** as visitors will be able to observe the canvas from the Museum Wuyts-Van Campen en Baron Caroly, Lier (Belgium), that was only recently located, and the canvas from The Goya Museum of Castres, in addition to the canvas from the Prado Museum, Madrid. Of particular interest is the celebrated canvas entitled ***Virgen con el Niño y San Juanito (Virgin and Child with Infant St. John)***, known as ***La Serrana***, from Pollock House, Glasgow. Its contemplation, together with ***La Sagrada Familia en el taller del carpintero (Holy Family in the Carpenter's Workshop)*** that used to form part of the collection of the Royal Palace of Noordeinde in The Hague and which is today in the hands of a private collection in Paris, permits us to analyse the creative process of the artist in his beginnings to which other compositions such as ***Desposorios místicos de Santa Catalina (Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine)*** from the Museum of Arte Antiga, Lisbon, that has been specially restored for the occasion also belongs. The popular canvas ***Sagrada Familia del pajarito (Holy Family with Small Bird)*** loaned to us by

The Prado Museum, Madrid, closes this section dedicated to more intimate subjects sharing the same aesthetic and artistic airs.

Large Scale Canvasses

Among the large scale canvasses, the following works stand out particularly: ***José y la mujer de Putifar*** (*Joseph and the Wife of Putifar*), loaned exceptionally by the Staatliche Museum, Kassel (Germany), and the tenebrous ***La Santa Cena*** (*Last Supper*) from the Church of Santa María la Blanca in Seville, in which Murillo possibly painted his self-portrait in the figure of St. John. On the other hand, ***La Inmaculada Concepción con fray Juan de Quirós*** (*Virgin of the Immaculate Conception with Brother Juan de Quirós*) from the Archdiocese of Seville is a magnificent example of the skill of Murillo in depicting the Immaculate Conception, a painting that was perhaps the most well-known and most-praised of his works for quite some time. Finally, the large scale canvas of ***San Agustín lavando los pies de Cristo*** (*St. Augustine Washing the Feet of Christ*) from the Fine Arts Museum, Valencia, is also included in this section.

Mary Magdalene and St. Catherine of Alexandria

The iconographies of Mary Magdalene and St. Catherine of Alexandria, both of which are represented next, together make up a section of great expressive intensity.

The canvas of the first Saint depicts her withdrawal to the desert for thirty years as a repentant penitent. Of particular interest is the fact that one of the very first versions of St. Mary Magdalene in a setting clearly influenced by Zurbarán and painted by Murillo in 1640 was located for this exhibition. The canvas from London is of great interest since it represents the reappearance of one of the works of the artist in the study of the young Murillo. The force and Verism of the painting contrast with the delicacy of the different versions of the National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin, and the Arango Collection, both of which are also present here. Lastly, represented by the critical moment of rejection of all worldly goods, the canvas titled ***Santa María Magdalena renunciando a los placeres mundanos*** (*St. Mary Magdalen Renouncing Worldly Life*) from the Virginia Museum of Art in Richmond (U.S.A.) is particularly expressive. More than a century has gone by since this particular painting was last exhibited in our country.

As far as the two different versions of St. Catherine of Alexandria are concerned, the painting belonging to the Focus-Abengoa Foundation - a "divine" portrait - represents a true recovery. After Marshal Soult appropriated the work from the Church of Santa Catalina of Seville in the XIX century, this particular work passed through the hands of different English entities and collections until research carried out in preparation for this exhibition confirmed that the painting was attributable to Murillo. Lastly, the ***Santa Catalina de Alejandría mártir*** (*St. Catherine of Alexandria*) canvas on loan from The Mie Prefectural Art Museum, Japan, also

represents another important encounter: historian Diego Angulo, the author of the *catalogue raisonné* or comprehensive catalogue of artworks by Murillo, discovered the painting in a private London collection. All traces of this particular canvas had been lost until it was acquired by the Japanese Museum.

Vision, Ecstasy and Penitence

The Young Murillo Exhibition draws to a close with a section dedicated to the penitent saints in ecstasy. ***San Pedro en lágrimas*** (*St. Peter Weeping*) and ***San Lesmes*** (*St. Lesmes*) of the Fine Arts Museum, Bilbao and ***San Jerónimo*** (*St. Jerome*) of the Prado Museum, Madrid, make up the homage paid by the artist to *Master* Ribera and particularly stress Murillo's capacity to "humanise" his subjects.

These works, together with the two versions of ***San Francisco*** (*St. Francis*) from Antwerp Cathedral and the Seville Fine Arts Museum, formed the origins of this exhibition project that, on one hand, allows visitors to delve deeper into the collections of the Fine Arts Museums of Bilbao and Seville, both of which are the patrons of this exhibition, whilst, on the other, giving them the opportunity to study the first decisive, but little-known years of one of the most outstanding Spanish painters for the very first time.