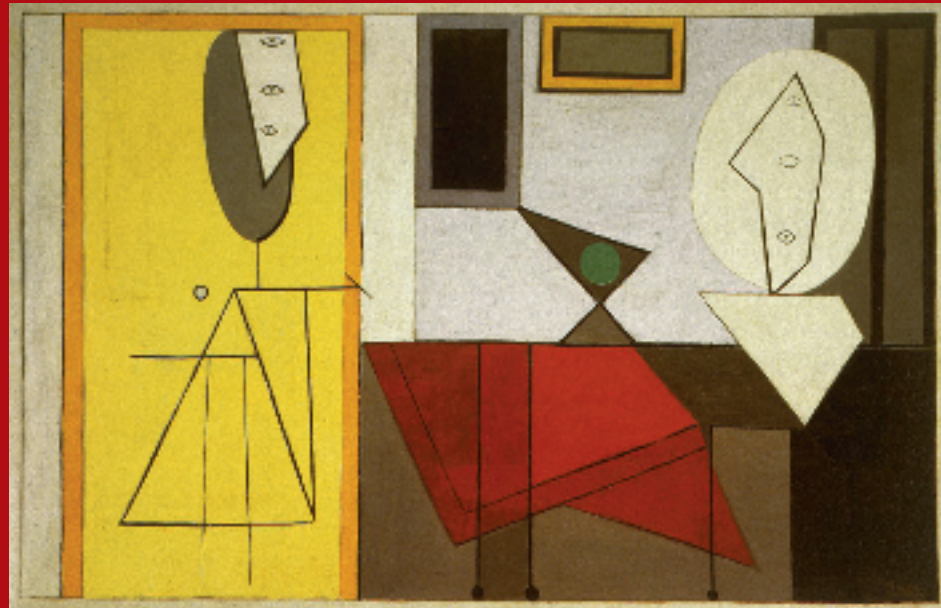


## CONTRIBUTORS

SARAH SCHROTH  
EDWARD J. SULLIVAN  
JOHN H. ELLIOTT  
RICHARD L. KAGAN  
JESÚS ESCOBAR  
STEVEN N. ORSO  
ELLEN PROKOP  
LISA A. BANNER  
REVA WOLF  
ROBERT S. LUBAR  
ALEXANDER VERGARA  
PATRICK LENAGHAN  
ANDALEEB BADIEE BANTA  
LISA A. ROTMIL  
CLARA BARGELLINI  
SUZANNE L. STRATTON-PRUITT  
LUISA ELENA ALCALÁ  
JULIE A. SHEAN  
JEFFREY SCHRADER  
ELEANOR GOODMAN  
LISA DUFFY-ZEBALLOS



ABOVE: Pablo Picasso, *The Studio*, winter 1927–28, oil on canvas, 149.9 × 231.2 cm.  
Gift of Walter P. Chrysler, The Museum of Modern Art, New York

FRONT COVER: Francisco de Goya y Lucientes, *Manuel Osorio Manrique de Zúñiga*,  
c. late 1780s–early 1790s, oil on canvas, 127 × 101.6 cm.  
Jules Bache Collection, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

CSA

CENTER FOR SPAIN  
IN AMERICA

Paul Holberton publishing



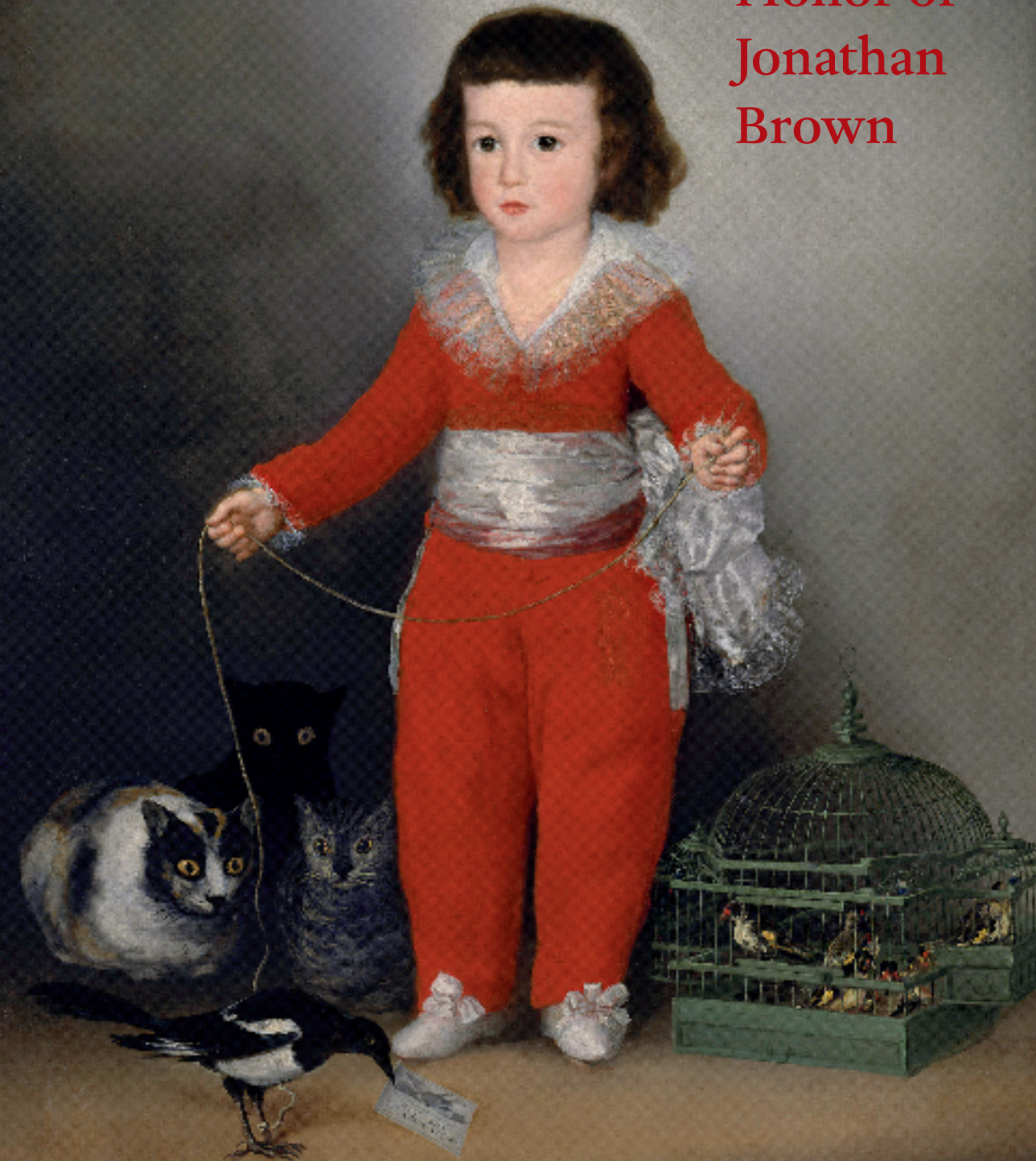
php  
CSA

## ART IN SPAIN AND THE HISPANIC WORLD

### Essays in Honor of Jonathan Brown



This series of essays by Jonathan Brown's colleagues, collaborators, and former students are the fruits of his teaching and scholarship. They constitute the latest research in the area of art history Brown revolutionized by crossing disciplines and applying new methodologies. Each article reflects his innovative perspective on art-making in Spain and colonial Latin America. This volume celebrates the contributions Brown has made in the advance of our understanding of the field.



EDITED BY SARAH SCHROTH

Paul Holberton publishing  
in association with  
CENTER FOR SPAIN IN AMERICA



RICHARD L. KAGAN

## El Greco's Portraits Reconsidered

It was almost thirty years ago, over dinner in Madrid, that Jonathan Brown asked whether I, as a historian, would have any interest in being involved in exhibition to be called *El Greco of Toledo*. As it happened, I was just then working on various aspects of Toledo's history, and the opportunity to think about the city in relation to its most famous artist was far too tempting to resist. Little did Jonathan imagine that by inviting my participation in this project he would also be taking on another student—myself. I am eternally grateful to him for his historical tutelage and for encouraging me to think about and look at pictures in relation to the historical context in which they were originally produced. And so began a collaboration, and, more importantly, a deep and abiding friendship that endures to this day.

In the 1982 exhibition, Jonathan and I attempted to strip away the myths surrounding El Greco, among them the idea that he was an isolated genius totally caught up in the mystical currents associated with such figures as St. Teresa of Ávila or St. John of the Cross. In its place, we posited the image of an artist who owed his success to a select group of high-minded clerics, nobles, and municipal officials who appreciated his particular brand of highly intellectualized Mannerist art.<sup>1</sup>

Since then, a number of scholars, including my friend Fernando Marías, have revised this interpretation by suggesting that El Greco's headstrong personality severely limited his contacts in Toledo. El Greco's patrons, Marías argues, were relatively few, and the number of large scale commissions he landed hardly sufficient to maintain a permanent workshop.<sup>2</sup> According to this interpretation, El Greco and his

helpers kept busy by selling the equivalent of mass-produced, off-the-rack religious pictures—mostly saints—to churches, convents, and monasteries in and around the city. In short, El Greco remained a permanent outsider, the quintessential other, more Greek than Toledan, an artist with only a handful of supporters and friends.

In this paper I propose, albeit briefly, to carve through this particular controversy by suggesting that the artist's success in Toledo—and to a lesser degree, in nearby Madrid—depended primarily upon his skills as a portraitist. This success, I will argue, rested upon his ability to execute portraits that were not only artistically innovative but also especially designed to appeal to sectors of Toledan society previously unaccustomed to seeing themselves on canvas.<sup>3</sup>

Of key importance here are two factors, one artistic, the other sociological. In terms of art, El Greco brought with him to Spain an Italian tradition of portraiture that resembled what Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo defined as “intellectual portraits” that portrayed “reality not as we see it, but as it ought to be seen.”<sup>4</sup> Translated into the artistic practice of the day, this meant El Greco was less interested in *imitatio* than *inventio*, or painting what the artist interprets reality to be. El Greco's own thoughts on this issue can be found in his commentaries on Vitruvius where he writes that a painter should not attempt to reproduce reality but rather, using his own sense of judgment—*juicio*—to transform that reality into something more beautiful—*hermosura*—a technique that resulted in the elongated figures, or *figure serpentine*, characteristically found in El Greco's religious pictures.<sup>5</sup> *Juicio* also influenced El Greco's portraits, which, in his opinion, needed to do more than produce an exact physical likeness. Rather they were supposed to convey a glimpse of what Pliny had called the sitter's *anima*, or what Leonardo da Vinci described as “the movements of the mind.” El Greco referred to the psychological dimension of portraiture with such words as *vida* and *grazia*. It follows that El Greco was very critical of those artists whose figures failed to conform to his notions of both *sveltezza* and *grazia*.<sup>6</sup>

Just who these artists were El Greco does not say, but he was probably referring to his fellow painters in Toledo, such as Luis de Velasco and Blas de Prado, most of whom, trained as they were in a Flemish tradition of painting that privileged both imitation and a sense of stateliness or decorum, frowned on the kind of artistic license advocated by El Greco. Miguel Falomir has also suggested that the majority of sixteenth-century Spanish artists were not inclined to paint secular portraits, and in doing so abandoned that particular field to a succession of foreigners who, starting at the end of the fifteenth century, virtually monopolized portrait



Fig. 1 El Greco, *View of Toledo*, c. 1600

Oil on canvas, 121.3 × 108.6 cm., H.O. Havemeyer Collection,  
Bequest of Mrs. H.O. Havemeyer, 1929, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

painting at the royal court.<sup>7</sup> It was much the same in Toledo, where a series of portraits of that city's archbishops was initially entrusted to the Flemish artist, Juan de Borgoña.<sup>8</sup> Otherwise, the only portraits produced in Toledo—and the same is true for most other cities in sixteenth-century Spain—occurred within an expressly religious context, either as funerary effigies or donor portraits. It follows that





Fig. 2 El Greco, *Burial of the Count of Orgaz*, c. 1586–89  
Oil on canvas, 460 × 360 cm., Church of Santo Tomé, Toledo



Fig. 1 Joachim Patinir, *Charon crossing the River Styx*, c. 1520–24  
Oil on panel, 64 × 103 cm., Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid

green and the foreground has areas of brown color. In the distance are mountains, and closer to the viewer we typically find large rock formations. Large bodies of water are present in the scenes, and often extend perpendicularly from foreground to background. While the landscape is seen from above, and at an angle, vertical elements in the painting are seen straight on. Small animals, houses, boats, and other such elements appear throughout the picture. Several figures are always present in these paintings, enacting a story, nearly always taken from the history of religion. Sometimes the figures are all small or fairly small. In other cases a main figure or group of figures is rather large and prominent. In every case the landscape occupies most of the space of the painting, and is much larger in comparison to the figures than what had been common in previous paintings.

Only some of the abundant examples of paintings that follow this formula can be attributed to Patinir (for example, figs. 1–2). Others are too distant from his known originals to be associated directly with him or with his workshop (there are dozens of paintings that fit into this category, in museums as well as in private hands).<sup>25</sup>

As a result of this abundance of Patinir lookalikes, the creative personality of the master is somewhat muddled. In a conversation with Jonathan Brown during one of his visits to Madrid with his wife Sandra, he mapped out for me, in a





Fig. 2 Joachim Patinir, *Landscape with St. Jerome*, c. 1516–17  
Oil on panel, 74 × 91 cm., Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid

characteristically clear-sighted phrase, the system of making and marketing paintings that explains this complicated body of work: “Look, logo, and knock-off,” he called it. Indeed, Patinir’s case can be explained in these terms. The artist created an original look, a style that was easy to identify, and that inspired demand. He himself produced many paintings that responded to that look, and could be identified by the market as coming out of his studio. Finally, other painters not affiliated with the master or his shop imitated his successful product.

Paintings attributed to Patinir can be organized following this model. At least twenty-six paintings that exist came out of his studio: these are the works through which he created a look or brand, and from which he benefited. Thirteen of them are of higher quality than the rest, and form the nucleus of secure attributions to the master.<sup>26</sup> In all these paintings the landscape is sufficiently similar so that it can be attributed to a single artist, and because of signatures on four of those paintings,

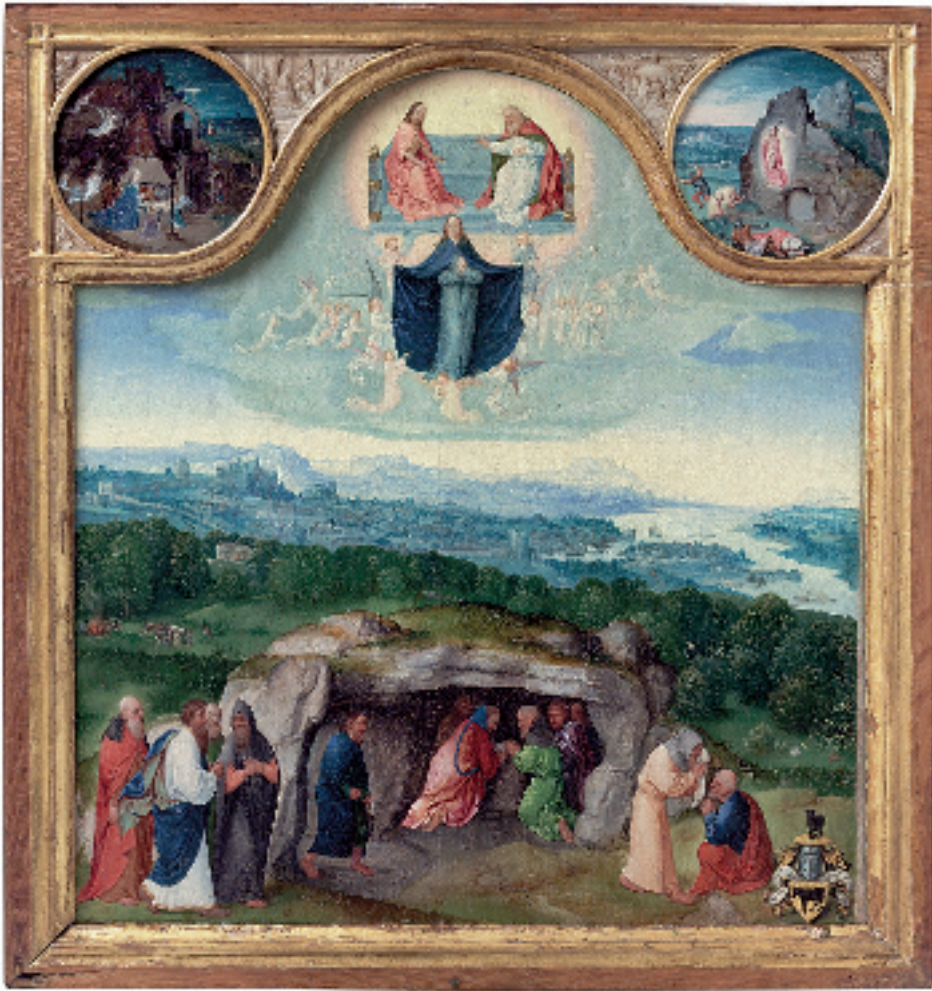


Fig. 3 Joachim Patinir, *Landscape with the Assumption of the Virgin, the Nativity, the Resurrection, the Adoration of the Magi, the Ascension of Christ, St. Mark and an Angel, and St. Luke and an Ox*, c. 1510–20  
Oil on panel, 62.2 × 58.7 cm., Philadelphia Museum of Art

and because of information from inventories, we know that the author of these landscapes was Patinir himself. Most of the figures in these paintings are also by a single artist, probably also Patinir.<sup>27</sup> We only know about the origin of one of the twelve paintings in this group, a *Landscape with the Assumption of the Virgin* in the Philadelphia Museum of Art, which bears the coat of arms of the prominent German banker and merchant Lucas Rem, and was probably commissioned by





Fig. 5 Joachim Patinir and workshop, *Landscape with St. John the Baptist preaching* c. 1510–20  
Oil on panel, 37 × 51 cm., Philadelphia Museum of Art

worked on the different paintings, and Patinir may have intervened in the making of some of them. With these paintings, and other similar ones that must have been lost, Patinir was taking advantage of the success of his higher line of products in order to increase his profits. *A Landscape with the Preaching of St. John the Baptist* in the Philadelphia Museum of Art is an interesting case of a painting that belongs to this second tier (fig. 5). Like the *Assumption*, this picture bears the coat of arms of Lucas Rem. But while in that painting the insignia was planned from the beginning (it is painted on a reserve), in this picture it was painted over previous layers of paint. This probably indicates that it was made for sale on the open market, rather than on commission by Rem: only after Rem had seen it and decided to buy it was the coat of arms added to the picture. The *Landscape with the Preaching of St. John the Baptist* is clearly a work of lower quality than the *Assumption*: it is painted with less attention to detail, and in a less competent manner than its exquisite counterpart. But it is worth noting that both products could interest a prominent and wealthy client such as Rem. We must assume that the difference in quality between

the *Assumption* and this other painting was as obvious to him as it is to us. But the second tier product was obviously enough for him on some occasions, presumably for economic reasons. Patinir's ability to produce paintings of different levels allowed him to adapt to the demands of his clients.

All other extant paintings that follow the Patinir formula, and the many more that must have originally existed, are knock-offs of Patinir's products: they were made in other shops after his formula was successfully established. Some may have been made during his lifetime, others in the following decades (see fig. 6). They are all interesting primarily as witnesses to the success of his formula. As Montias has written, product innovation "tends to be imitated if not copied outright, unless it is protected by patents or secrecy."<sup>30</sup>

With the information that is available we cannot form a clear chronological sequence for Patinir's paintings, but there are reasons to believe that the two tiers of works coming out of his studio were produced simultaneously.<sup>31</sup> We know that Patinir was active from 1515 to 1524. The *Assumption* that has been mentioned above provides another piece of information: it includes the Rem coat of arms, but not that of Rem's wife Anna Ochainin, whom he married on May 17, 1518. The Ochainin arms are included, together with Rem's arms, in another painting by Patinir, *Landscape with the Rest on the Flight into Egypt* (Geneva, Bonna collection). The *Assumption*, one of Patinir's finest pictures, must therefore have been painted before Rem's wedding. From this we learn that by 1518 Patinir was able to produce his best work. The dendrochronological data for the panel supports of Patinir's paintings undertaken in preparation for the publication of the book *Patinir: Essays and Critical Catalogue* in 2007 did not provide enough evidence to help with this matter: in many cases, the supports were ready for use several years before the time when Patinir could have used them, and in some others they were ready within the time-frame of 1515–24, when Patinir was active.

From this information we can conclude that all, or nearly all the works by Patinir and his shop that survive can be considered mature works.<sup>32</sup> It would thus appear that his business consisted in simultaneously producing the two tiers of paintings that have been described: the best paintings were the signature works that he sold to the most distinguished patrons, in some cases probably on commission. These works also served to give status to his brand product. Probably at the same time his workshop made works of lower quality, but still destined for the high end of the market in comparison to the bulk of art that was sold in Antwerp. The fact that three of the four pictures by Patinir and his shop owned by Rem





Fig. 6 Anonymous imitator of Patinir, *Landscape with the Baptism of Christ and the Sermon of St. John*  
After 1520, oil on panel, 33 × 46 cm., Foundation E.G. Bührle Collection, Zurich

were clearly inferior to the other (the *Assumption*) shows that high-end clients were also interested in the second tier of his work.

That some of Patinir's most important paintings were made on commission, or with the intention of being sold to elite clients, may seem to contradict an explanation of Patinir's art based on the context provided by a competitive market. But the profiles of an artist who worked for the highest levels of patronage, and one whose making and marketing strategies were more tied up with a burgeoning market can be made to overlap. Patinir developed a new type of painting because of the pressure from the market, and he used practices developed because of that context to produce variants and increase his gains. At the same time, he was able to maintain the interest of art collectors at the highest level, prolonging the type of connection between painter and patron that had benefited the careers of the leading masters of the fifteenth century in the Netherlands.