

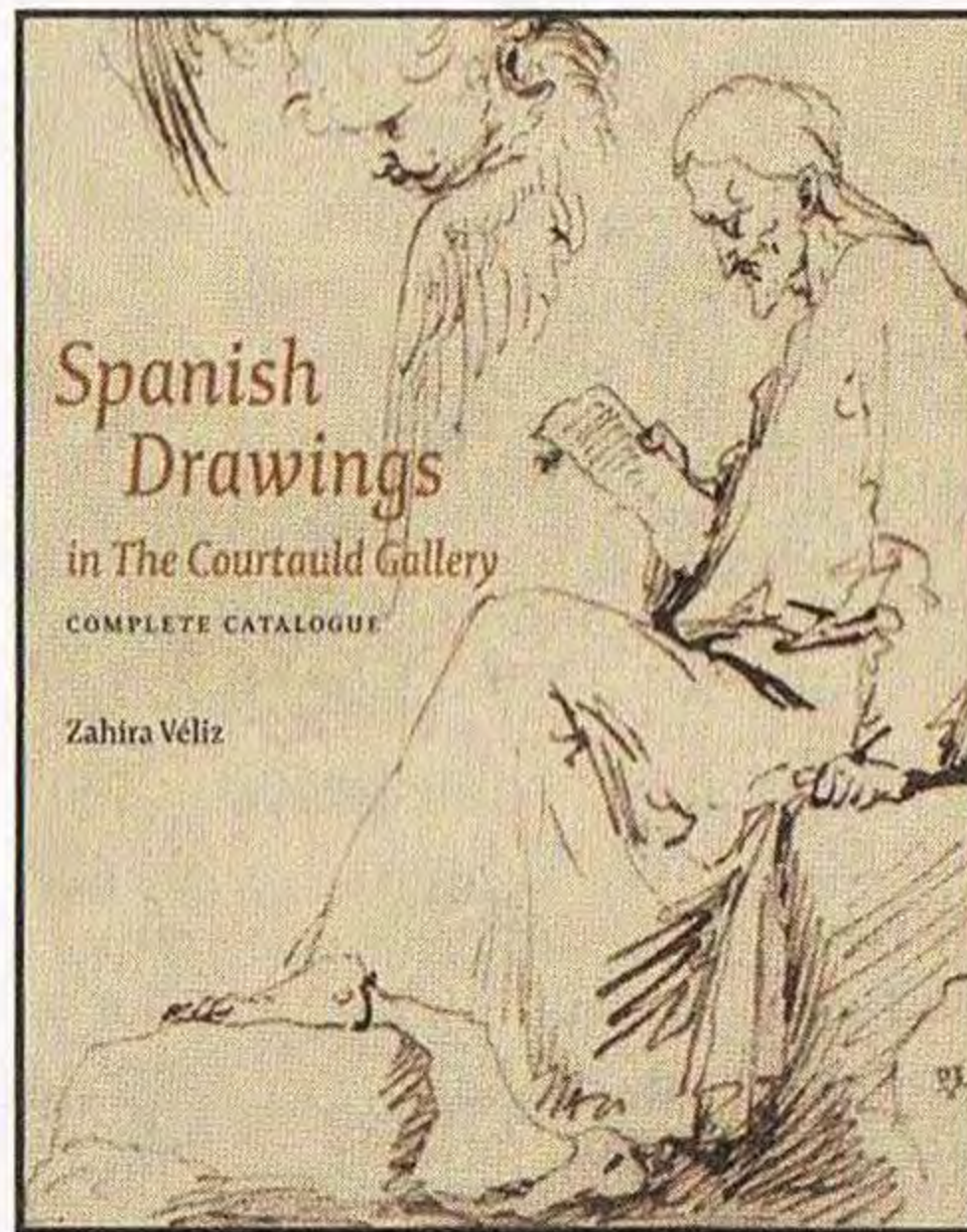
# The gain in Spain

## *Evidence of the growing interest in Spanish drawings*

The study of Spanish drawings is experiencing something of a renaissance. In the past few years, a number of handsome catalogues raisonnés of drawings by Spanish artists (Alonso Cano, Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, Mariano Salvador Maella) have been published, and exhibitions devoted to the subject have taken place, most notably at the Prado in Madrid and the Frick Collection in New York. This book is the most recent addition, cataloguing thoroughly for the first time the collection of Spanish drawings in the Courtauld Institute in London.

The structure of the catalogue is dictated by the collection of 116 drawings and divided into nine sections, geographically and chronologically. It begins with a very helpful introductory essay on collecting Spanish drawings, their characteristics and their functions. Each following section then begins with a brief discussion to help orientate the reader by placing the works in context, which is required, given the very different types of drawings from across Spain. Concise biographies of the relevant artists, an appendix of watermarks and a representative bibliography provide useful information that is often hard for English readers to find.

The quality of the Courtauld collection is uneven and



because of this, perhaps a little too much has been made of each sheet. In the catalogue, there is a slight tendency to stretch the evidence too far in the quest to associate an artist with a drawing. The logic of the comparisons and the conclusions reached is sometimes difficult to understand. This should not undermine the validity of this publication but is perhaps symptomatic of the cataloguing imperative and process, where the goal is to establish authorship or a school. Several sheets present near impossible challenges. A case in point is the drawing of an outstretched hand catalogued as 18th-century Seville (no.102). It could be anything, and if it is Spanish, it is probably by Anton Raphael Mengs or the academic artists working in his circle in Madrid.

Old attributions written on

drawings, especially if they are by minor or little-known artists, should be taken seriously. In this publication, they have sometimes been dismissed. For example a drawing of St Paul (no.4) that bears the name of (Pablo de) Céspedes has now been attributed to Patricio Cajés (died 1612). Almost nothing is known of Céspedes's drawings, but given his years in Rome from around 1559, this is precisely the sort of drawing one might expect him to have made.

The extremely high production quality of the catalogue must be noted. The elegant design and beautiful photographs make it a highly attractive volume, which enhances the value of this sort of publication. It is sponsored by the Madrid-based Centro de Estudios Europa Hispánica, which has valiantly undertaken to support publications on Spanish drawings. The increase in scholarship on the subject has contributed to the reversal of critical fortunes of Spanish drawings, and it has become very clear that, contrary to earlier attitudes, drawing was very much part of artistic practice in Spain from the 16th century on. ■

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■ **Spanish Drawings in the Courtauld Gallery: Complete Catalogue**

**Zahira Véliz**

**Paul Holberton Publishing, 368 pp, £80, \$125 (hb)**