

recalled the drawing room as ‘painted coarsely in bands of wild foliage [. . .] the South Sea Island kind of thing.’<sup>1</sup> Wild puts it differently, calling it ‘an exultation of pattern making’, and might have subtitled her book ‘Red House Restored’. Based on newly revealed evidence, John Tredinnick has produced a wonderful recreation of the original decorative scheme in the form of digital images, in which for the first time one can see it as it was intended (Fig.7). And the author has assembled illustrations of all the furniture, whether in England, Australia or the United States, known to have been in the house in Morris’s time. She enables the reader to see Red House as a deeply considered, integrated whole.

The book’s subtitle alludes to Alfred Tennyson’s *The Palace of Art* (1832), a long allegorical poem describing the cultivation of the poet’s moral and artistic sensibilities through the metaphor of a many-roomed, multifariously decorated mansion. Morris more than once likened his house to a real-life realisation of Tennyson’s dream palace – ‘a Palace of Art of my own’ – but the poem may have had a further significance for him. The poet’s conscience in due course recoils from such complacent self-centredness, yet he does not destroy his imagined creation but resolves instead to share his vision with friends. Wild emphasises not only the essential coherence of Red House’s decoration, but the extent to which it was a communal enterprise. Did Morris, in sharing in the creation of his own house, in some degree consciously identify with the poet’s mission? Dante Gabriel Rossetti at least, one of Morris’s chief collaborators, would have understood, having illustrated the poem for the publisher Edward Moxon in 1857.

For all the care that later owners have often devoted to Red House, they were inevitably guided by their own perceptions of the building, of its significance and of its creators. Wild’s work will now underpin whatever policies for the house are adopted by the National Trust, which has owned it since 2003. The Trust has to decide how far it should acknowledge the work of these later custodians and how their interpretation of Morris and their practical needs affected what they did. As the founder of the Society for Protection of Ancient Buildings in 1877, Morris deplored ‘restoration’: buildings should be preserved with all their accumulated layers of history. Personally, too, he recognised the necessity of leaving his own dreams behind him. Yet while this later care deserves acknowledgement, the importance of Red

House lies primarily in Morris’s own vision. As a testimony to the importance of his beliefs in the values of community and creativity, Wild’s book makes it easier to see Red House not only as a document of the histories of taste and ideology but as a statement of aspirations. Such aspirations on behalf of culture and community are as much needed now as they have ever been.

<sup>1</sup> W.B. Scott, cited in W. Minto, ed.: *Autobiographical notes of the life of William Bell Scott and notices of his artistic and poetic circle of friends, 1830 to 1882*, London 1892, II, p.61.

### El Greco Comes to America: The Discovery of a Modern Old Master

*Edited by Inge Reist and José Luis Colomer. 264 pp. incl. 156 col. ills. (The Frick Collection, New York, and Centro de Estudios Europa Hispánica, Madrid, 2017), \$65. ISBN 978-84-15245-73-5.*

by ERIC ZAFRAN

In his groundbreaking study of American taste, *L'évolution du goût aux États-Unis, d'après l'histoire des collections* (1938), René Brimo noted that El Greco ‘enjoyed a tremendous popularity in the United States beginning around 1920’, and identifies a *Holy Family* in the collection of the New York jeweller Michael Dreicer (1867–1921) as one of the first works by the artist to come to the country (Fig.8).<sup>1</sup> Neither Brimo nor Dreicer are mentioned, however, in the handsome and informative new book published under the aegis of the Frick Collection’s Center for the History of Collecting. Building upon the Center’s earlier history of collecting Spanish art in America,<sup>2</sup> it is the first in the series to deal with a single artist. Unlike the previous publications, it is a compendium of talks (given at a symposium in New York in 2015) with additional commissioned essays. The stated goal is to review the history of what is labelled ‘Grecomania’ and ‘focus on the taste American collectors developed for El Greco’s work’ (pp.13–14).

Dreicer’s *Holy Family* had a most curious later history: after being bequeathed to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, on the owner’s death in 1921 and listed in their publications,<sup>3</sup> Dreicer’s will was contested by his family and the work returned to his widow, who placed it with the dealer French and Company. In 1949 French sold the painting to the Kress Foundation, which in 1959 donated it to the National Gallery of Art, Washington. The essays in the book cover the

major city museums of Boston, Philadelphia and Chicago, the Phillips Collection in Washington and the Frick Collection and the Hispanic Society, both in New York. The sad reason why the Metropolitan Museum’s notable collection of works by El Greco is not presented in detail is the untimely death of Walter Liedtke in 2015. The talk he gave at the conference was his last public appearance, and the editors, rather than publish his text, decided instead to make a video of his presentation available on the Frick’s website.<sup>4</sup> Liedtke does not mention the Dreicer picture and its short stay in the Metropolitan Museum, but does discuss the importance of the gifts of works by the collectors Louisine and Henry Havemeyer.

The influence of Mary Cassatt on the Havemeyers and that of the painters John Singer Sargent and William Merritt Chase on other American collectors and institutions are among the repeated themes of this publication. Oddly, however, the institution with perhaps the country’s most outstanding body of works by El Greco, the National Gallery of Art, Washington, which owns seven paintings, does not get an individual chapter. As a result, although information on the most significant donors of these works, Peter Widener and his son Joseph, is found in the Philadelphia chapter, no mention is made anywhere of either Chester Dale or the Kress Foundation. The latter not only disbursed major works by El Greco to Washington but also donated a fine painting by him of St Francis to the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco in 1961.

With its focus primarily on the East Coast, this book fails adequately to address what the late Léo Bronstein referred to as the attraction across America of ‘the enigma’ of El Greco.<sup>5</sup> By the present author’s count there are some eighty-five pictures by El Greco in America and another fifteen or so school works. It would have been helpful if this publication had included a list of these works with the dates of their acquisition.<sup>6</sup> Although there is much on the significant connection between El Greco and Cézanne, Picasso and various German Expressionists, there is nothing on the early regard for the painter in America. A painting by him, identified as *St Peter of Alcantara*, was exhibited in Chicago in 1859.<sup>7</sup> The prevailing opinion on the artist, as found in the *Cyclopedia of Painters and Paintings* (1885), was that although his best work was the *Burial of the Count of Orgaz* (1586–88; S. Tomé, Toledo) and ‘he left some good portraits’, later in his career ‘he adopted a grayish style of

8. *Holy Family with St Anne and the infant John the Baptist*, by El Greco (Domenikos Theotokopoulos). c.1595–1600. Canvas, 53.2 by 34.4 cm. (The National Gallery of Art, Washington).

coloring and greatly deteriorated'.<sup>8</sup> Bernard Berenson, writing of El Greco to Isabella Stewart Gardner in 1904 – as observed by Ronni Baer in the chapter on Boston – reflects the equivocal attitude of the time: 'We have worshipped him for years. Though he generally painted rubbish, he sometimes rises to great sublimity of imagination' (pp.76–77). In her 1932 novel set in the 1920s, *The Gods Arrive*, Edith Wharton, a close friend of Berenson, even has one of her protagonists working on a study of Byzantine influence on El Greco.

The book ends with a brief 'Epilogue' by the distinguished scholar of Spanish art Jonathan Brown, 'The many facets of El Greco', in which he rightly calls attention to the importance of the catalogue raisonné published by his fellow American Harold E. Wethey in 1962. Brown refers to it as 'a mandatory call to order' (p.228). In fact, Wethey's book was far from perfect in its attributions, but the author was not hidebound and was willing to change his judgments. Among the instances where he upgraded his attribution, as Dianne Dwyer Modestini has recently pointed out, is the *Portrait of an old man* (possibly the artist's brother) purchased in 1969 by Norton Simon from the Contini Bonacossi Collection, Florence, and now in the Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena.<sup>9</sup> This significant book makes one hope that in the future the Frick Collection might focus in a similar way on other notable individual or groups of artists collected in America – such as the English portraitists, Cézanne or Van Gogh.

1 R. Brimo: *The Evolution of Taste in American Collecting*, ed. and transl. K. Haltman, University Park PA 2016, p.184.

2 I. Reist and J.L. Colomer: *Collecting Spanish Art: Spain's Golden Age and America's Gilded Age*, New York and Madrid 2012.

3 H. B. Wehle: 'The Michael Dreicer Collection: part I', *Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (May 1922), pp.103–06; and B. Burroughs: *Catalogue of Paintings: The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, New York 1931, p.145.

4 [https://www.frick.org/interact/walter\\_liedtke\\_el\\_greco\\_metropolitan\\_museum\\_1905\\_present](https://www.frick.org/interact/walter_liedtke_el_greco_metropolitan_museum_1905_present), accessed 26th February 2019.

5 L. Bronstein: *El Greco*, New York 1966, p.14.

6 Such a list of collectors, locations and dates of acquisition would include: Henry Walters, Baltimore, 1902 (part of the Massarenti Collection purchase); Worcester Art Museum, 1922; Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 1924; Cleveland Museum of Art, 1926; John Ringling (now the Ringling, Sarasota), 1928; Harvard Art Museums, 1930 and 1943; Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, 1930, 1932 and 1952; Chester Dale, 1931 (to the National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1943); Cincinnati Art Museum, 1932; Saint Louis Art Museum,



1936; Memorial Art Gallery, Rochester, 1938; Robert H. Tannahill, 1938 (to Detroit Institute of Arts, 1970); San Diego Art Institute, 1940; Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, 1942; Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford CT, 1946; Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1946; Mrs Charlotte P. Hyde, Glen Falls NY, 1949 (to the Hyde Collection, 1952); George Clowes, Indianapolis, 1952 (to the Indianapolis Museum of Art, 2007); Cleveland Museum of Art, 1952; Dallas Museum of Art, 1964; San Diego Museum of Art, 1990; and Mr and Mrs Charles Wrightsman, 1960 (to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1978). America's two wealthiest museums purchased their El Grecos in more recent times – the Kimbell Art

Museum, Fort Worth, in 1977 and the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, in 2000.

7 See the pre-1877 exhibition catalogue index, Smithsonian Institution Research System, <https://sirir-artexhibition.si.edu/ipac20/ipac.jsp?profile=aeciall>, accessed 27th February 2019.

8 J.D. Champlin, Jr. and C.C. Perkins: *Cyclopedia of Painters and Paintings*, New York 1885 and 1913, II, p.171.

9 D.D. Modestini: *Masterpieces: Based on a Manuscript by Mario Modestini*, Florence 2018, pp.328–30. See also S. Campbell: *Collector without Walls: Norton Simon and His Hunt for the Best*, New Haven and London 2010, pp.93 and 322.