

## Book Review

Isabelle Kent (ed.), *Collecting Murillo in Britain and Ireland*. Madrid, Centro de Estudios Europa Hispánica, 2020. ISBN 978-84-15345-96-4. 352 pp., 136 col. illus. €38.47.

The ten essays in this volume present a fascinating picture of the taste for one artist, Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1617–1682), whose devotional images are widely known, but who is today much less appreciated than his two contemporaries, Velázquez and Zurbarán. Murillo's importance in the eighteenth century for artists like Reynolds and Gainsborough made him exceptional among Spanish artists, whose works – until the unleashing of Spanish paintings on to the market as a result of the Napoleonic Wars – were hardly collected outside Spain. The collections at Apsley House, deriving from the gift to the Duke of Wellington from Ferdinand VII of 165 paintings, including twelve by Murillo, was exceptional. It was also unusual in being acquired by an individual who had not travelled or resided in Spain (apart, of course, from his military campaigns there). It is thus very rewarding to be offered this volume of detailed, well-researched essays, which bring to light some of the principal collectors of Murillo. Through their analysis of collectors' purchases and acquisitions, and the display and dispersal of these collections, the essays not only detail the taste for and growing connoisseurship relating to Murillo's work, they also add significantly to our understanding of the art markets in Spain, Britain and Ireland.

The first essay, by Thierry Morel, covers Murillo's paintings at Houghton Hall. It is evident that the artist's position in the Houghton collection derived from similarities to artists such as Van Dyck and Carlo Maratta. Véronique Gerard-Powell's essay then traces the arrival of small numbers of Spanish paintings into Britain in the early eighteenth century, sometimes through diplomacy but mainly through former British residents in Seville or travellers and dealers such as John Blackwood. The scene is thus set for the main body of the book, the connections between collectors, travellers and Spain.

The first three essays, by Xanthe Brooke, Hugh Brigstocke and Isabelle Kent, recount the activities of four men who acquired works of art in differing ways at much the same time: Julian Benjamin Williams (d. 1866), Frank Hall Standish (1799–1840), William Eden (1803–1873) and General John Meade (1775–1849). Tracing the provenance of key works demonstrates how these men bought from each other and shared contacts and knowledge. They were also important in introducing Murillo to the three artists who are the focus of an essay by Claudia Hopkins – David Wilkie, John Frederick Lewis and John Philip – all of whom copied Murillo.

Eden and Williams also met the best-known exponent of Spanish art and culture, Richard Ford (1786–1858), whose two-volume *Hand-Book for Travellers in Spain and Readers at Home* (1854) introduced many English readers to Murillo. Thomas Bean demonstrates how Ford bought from Williams and met with Lewis in 1832 while in Spain, then later made purchases at Meade's sale in 1851. A further link is developed in the essay by Hilary Macartney, who covers the contribution of a friend of Ford, William Stirling Maxwell (1818–1876), whose *Annals of the Artists of Spain* (1847) took research and connoisseurship to a new level of professionalism. Maxwell was innovative in his approach, encouraging the use of photography to record works of art, in order to develop the widest possible knowledge of particular artists. It is curious (though possibly unconnected) that Maxwell's drawings ended up in the Witt Collection, and the Witt Library at the Courtauld Institute remains the key repository of photographs of works of art, used by countless scholars for research and cataloguing.

The series of essays is completed by two further investigations that mirror the opening chapters; one by Philip McEvansoneya on Irish collectors and one on a specific collector, Stephen Alers Hankey (1809–1878) by Robert Wenley. McEvansoneya's wide-ranging study reinforces the pattern of interest already depicted in Britain, but he emphasizes the important role that exhibitions had in disseminating the admiration for and collecting of Murillo in Ireland. The formation of the National Gallery of Ireland's collection

brought together several collections, most noticeably that of the Beit family. Among the Murillos bought by Sir Alfred Beit was *The Prodigal Son* series, which until 1896 had held a central role in the collection of the 2nd Earl of Dudley. The previously unknown collection of Alers Hankey, a banker and 'reluctant' slave owner, was largely acquired through the advice of Martin Colnaghi, and was both traditional in placing Murillo among Italian and Flemish paintings and more innovative in its interest in the less familiar artists, including Valdés Leal and Goya.

In the introduction, Xavier Bray and José Luis Colomer give a brief but useful framework to the volume, providing a historiography of the appreciation of Murillo's work between 1700 and 1900, when he fell out of favour. They rightly depict the way in which the collectors under discussion developed interest in and appreciation of Spanish

painting, but it seems a pity that this is discussed only from the British and Irish viewpoint and does not provide more context, in particular the rival collection of Spanish art bought by King Louis Philippe of France. The interlocking accounts, however, act as a remarkable prism, through which the reader can appreciate the multifaceted relationships and negotiations that link the works and their collectors. Difficult to pinpoint, these hidden aspects in the history of collecting are brought to light through the extensive archival research into letters, sales catalogues and published histories, which remain key sources for understanding the nuances of collecting history.

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