

DAMAGED SOUL
Visual Cultures of the
Penitent Magdalene in Spain

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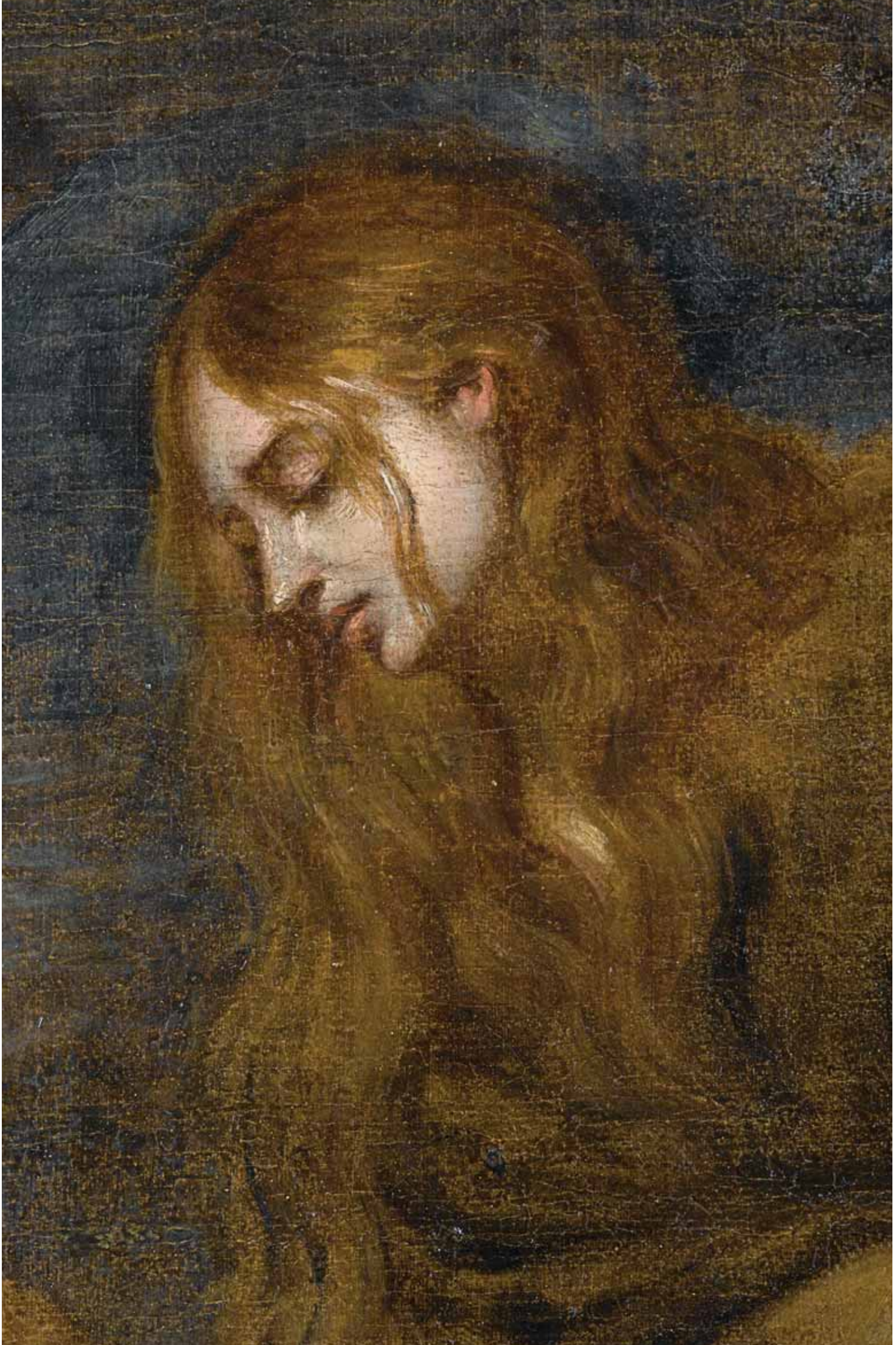
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Detail of Luis Tristán, *The Penitent Magdalene*, c. 1606–15,
oil on canvas, 110 × 100 cm. Spanish Gallery, Bishop Auckland

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Introduction

‘I was very devoted to the glorious Magdalene, and very many times I thought about her conversion, especially whenever I took communion [...] and I entrusted myself to this glorious saint in order to achieve forgiveness.’
Teresa of Ávila, *Libro de la vida*, 1588¹

This book explores the three and a half paintings of the Penitent Magdalene preserved in the Spanish Gallery at Bishop Auckland [figs 1–4].² These arresting images – by Juan Bautista Maíno (1581–1649), Luis Tristán (1585–1624) and Mateo Cerezo (1637–1666), with the ‘half’ being a reduced oil-sketch by the latter – feature arguably the most popular female saint in Spain engaging in an act of contrition.³ Sharing the same naturalistic style, the paintings show different attitudes to devotion, although they all encourage viewers to participate in the Christian practices of prayer, repentance and solitude. When seen as a group, these little-known pictures reveal some of the Counter-Reformation tensions between body and spirit. They also offer

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- 1 ‘Era yo muy devota de la gloriosa Madalena, y muy muchas veces pensaba en su conversión, en especial cuando comulgaba [...] y encomendábame aquesta gloriosa santa para que me alcanzase el perdón’ (1588); Teresa de Jesús 2022, ch. IX, 193–94.
 - 2 A catalogue of this collection is yet to be produced, but see the recent Baker-Bates 2024, Brooke 2024 and Kent 2022. For Bishop Auckland before the opening of the Spanish Gallery, see Baron and Beresford 2014, 13–43.
 - 3 A sample of this popularity, which the Magdalene shared with Saint Catherine, is found in seventeenth-century Madrid inventories. See the classic repertory by Burke and Cherry 1997, II, 78. See also Morán Turina and Portús Pérez 1997, 241; Delenda 2001.



Fig. 1 Detail of Juan Bautista Maíno,
The Penitent Magdalene, c. 1609
[see fig. 3.5]



Fig. 2 Detail of Luis Tristán,
The Penitent Magdalene, c. 1606–15
[see fig. 4.5]



Fig. 3 Detail of Mateo Cerezo,
The Penitent Magdalene, c. 1665–66
[see fig. 5.4]



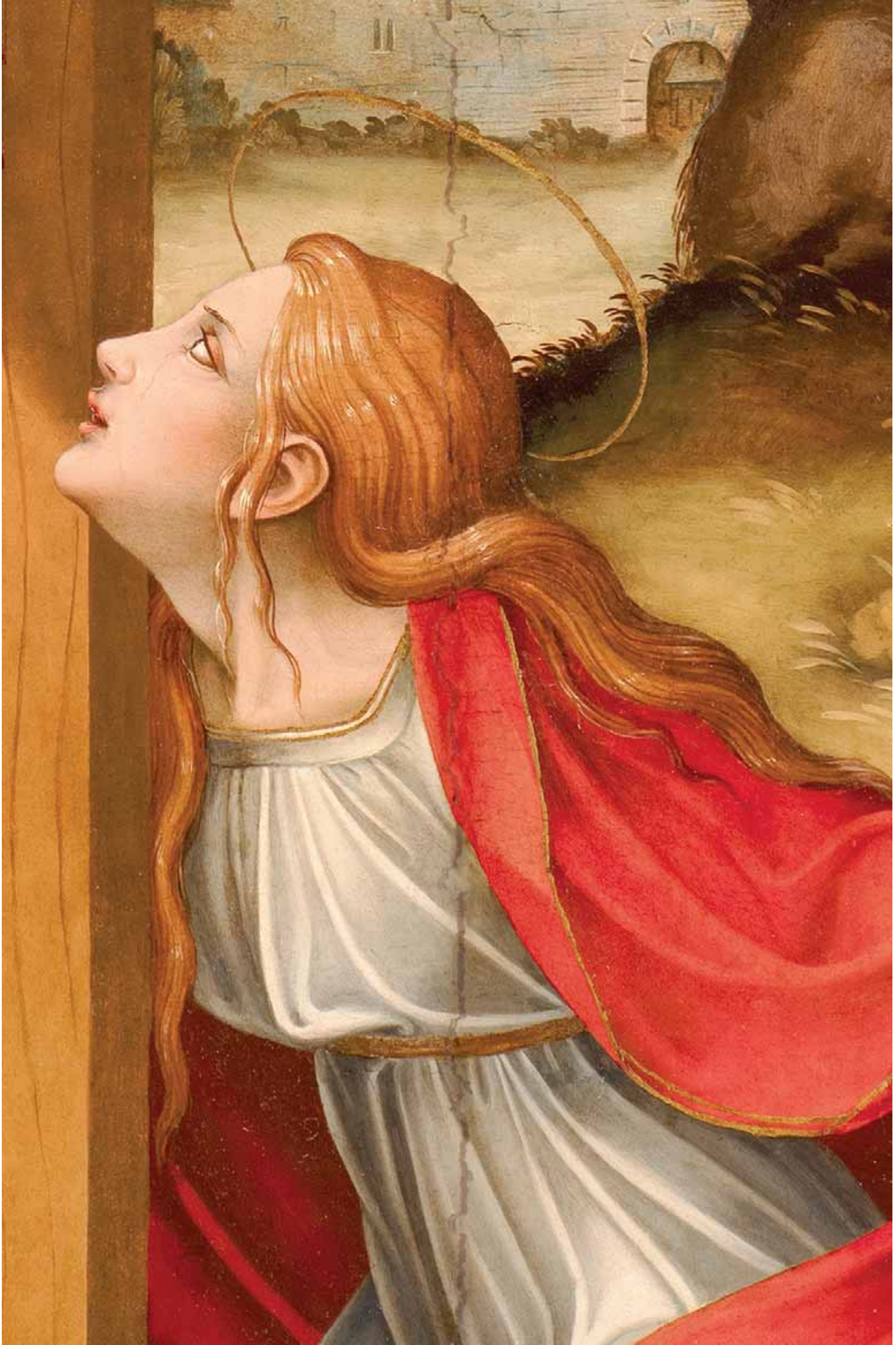
Fig. 4 Detail of Mateo Cerezo,
Study for The Penitent Magdalene,
c. 1665 [see fig. 5.10]

the opportunity to explore the dramatic changes that occurred in Spanish painting during the sixty-year period spanning circa 1610 to 1670.

By analysing these pictures, we will explore contemporary attitudes towards sin, the body and the role of women in Spanish society during the Baroque period, an era that partly coincided with what has been traditionally defined,

PART I

INTERPRETING AND IMAGING
THE PENITENT MAGDALENE
IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY



CHAPTER 1

GABRIELE PALEOTTI AND MAKING SACRED IMAGES AFTER THE COUNTER-REFORMATION

The *Magdalenes* discussed in this book were all painted in the seventeenth century, during the Counter-Reformation – the response of the beleaguered Catholic Church to the Reformation, considered to have begun with the Council of Trent (held between 1545 and 1563). While the council was primarily concerned with counteracting Protestantism, the meetings also addressed other topics, including the relevance of sacraments, and various strategies for self-reform. The twenty-fifth – and final – session of the council decreed, for example, on the intercession of the saints (including the significance of their relics) and invited bishops to use sacred images to teach the mysteries of faith.¹ Iconoclasm had become a larger problem than it had been previously, particularly in northern Europe, prompting renewed emphasis on sacred imagery. But the twenty-fifth session was a short one and scholars have since established that the issue of holy images was discussed in haste, almost as an afterthought.²

Over thirty years after the Council of Trent had first been convened, Cardinal Gabriele Paleotti, Archbishop of Bologna, who himself had

1 An English translation of the decree on the invocation of saints, the veneration of relics, and sacred use of images from the twenty-fifth session of the Council of Trent is in Hall 2011, 271–72.

2 O'Malley 2013.



Fig. 1.7 *Penitenza*, woodcut, 95.5 × 78 mm, in Cesare Ripa, *Iconologia, ouero descrizione d'imagini delle virtù...*, Padua, Pietro Paolo Tozzi, 1611. The British Library, London

Maarten de Vos [fig. 1.8] shows 'Penitence' (*Homo poenitents*) as a bare-chested man, his arms crossed over his chest, accompanied by *Poenitentia*, an elegantly dressed woman holding a scourge, and *Dolor*, another woman, her



CHAPTER 2

THE MAGDALENE IN DOMESTIC SPAIN: MATERIAL CULTURE AND DEVOTIONAL PRACTICE

As mentioned at the beginning of this book, Mary Magdalene was the female saint most commonly seen in painting collections in seventeenth-century Spain.¹ The image of the Penitent Magdalene became covetable and widespread, distributed widely not only through paintings but also through printed, decorative and popular arts. Here, we will investigate the presence of her image in the domestic sphere, with a brief introduction, followed by a discussion of a handful of images of the Penitent Magdalene, mostly from popular art, and mainly held today in Spanish collections. The aim is to connect the ‘high art’ produced by prestigious artists – and represented here by the Bishop Auckland *Magdalenes* by Maíno, Tristán and Cerezo – with more humble objects largely made by anonymous artists for use in daily life.² Emphasis will be given to smaller portable objects that imply private devotional use, but also to works that were personalised by their owners, or were even made by amateur artists. Some of these objects have been the subject of very little research, so it is hoped that this may open new avenues for further exploration.

By the seventeenth century, most people could afford to have paintings, prints and small devotional objects in their homes, a fact that is reflected

1 Burke and Cherry 1997, II, 97.

2 On this dichotomy see, for instance, Moxey 1994.

The portable Magdalene: from prints to jewellery

The Museo Nacional de Artes Decorativas in Madrid holds several objects relating to the domestic cult of the Magdalene. I will discuss here three works from their collection that highlight the diversity of the devotional material culture concerning the Magdalene in Golden Age Spain.¹⁹ These objects are a gilt leather panel (*guadamecí*), a bronze plaquette and a small pendant painting of the reclining Magdalene mounted in a jewelled frame.

Gilt leather paintings like *The Penitent Magdalene* [fig. 2.4], created by an anonymous craftsman, were widespread in early modern Spain.²⁰ Produced in large numbers, many for export, *guadamecí* panels were often purely decorative objects with floral compositions, intended as wall coverings. Although unusual to our eyes, *guadamecí* devotional pictures opted for very traditional iconographies (Saint Veronica, for instance, or the Ecce Homo) but they enjoyed popularity due to the immediacy of their designs and the attractive metallic shine that is central to this technique.²¹ The dating of these works can be elusive, due to the homogeneous and repetitive iconography, but this work has been tentatively ascribed to the seventeenth century. This particular image shows a bust of the Magdalene with a serene expression, fully clothed and holding a crucifix with both hands. The image alone would have been fully recognisable to viewers as the Magdalene, but the inscription in Roman lettering that runs around the frame leaves no doubt as to its function: ‘MARIA MAGDALENA ROGAD POR NOS AL SEÑOR’ (‘Mary Magdalene pray to the Lord on our behalf’). Thus, this picture functions as a channel to facilitate intercession with God. Mary Magdalene was an ideal saint for this role, as she was the closest woman to Christ after the Virgin Mary, having been with him in key moments of his life and notably after his resurrection. This *guadamecí* panel would have worked perfectly in an intimate domestic setting, the metallic background giving a warm glow under candlelight or a reflective shine if viewed in natural daylight. Light would have ‘activated’ the image, which when complemented with daily prayers, would have facilitated penance for a devout owner.

19 Most of the museum’s collection is kept in storage. Special thanks are due to Félix de la Fuente Andrés, Nuria Moreu Toloba and Javier González Zaragoza, who generously provided access to it and shared their extensive knowledge with me.

20 Inv. no. CE00430.

21 Koldeweij 1992, 84–88; Fournet 2019.

PART II

THE PAINTINGS: THREE AND
A HALF *PENITENT MAGDALENES*
AT BISHOP AUCKLAND



CHAPTER 3

JUAN BAUTISTA MAÍNO (1581–1649)

‘De muy alta pintura’
Inventory of Juan Matute, 1628¹

When the Prado held its first monographic exhibition of Juan Bautista Maíno in 2009, it was aptly titled *Un maestro por descubrir / A Little-known Master*.² The painter had been studied chiefly by Diego Angulo Íñiguez and Alfonso E. Pérez Sánchez in their classic 1969 monograph on painting in Madrid, and before them, by Enriqueta Harris, who carried out pioneering investigations into ‘the problems of Caravaggism in Spain’ and who studied Maíno’s work in this context.³ Carl Justi, in the late nineteenth century, assessed Maíno in *Diego Velázquez und sein Jahrhundert*, originally published in 1888. He (wrongly) believed Maíno to be a disciple of El Greco, taking his information from Antonio Palomino’s biography of the former.⁴ However, Justi also placed Maíno’s works firmly in the sphere of Caravaggio: ‘nobody has got so close to the Lombard painter as this Spanish

1 ‘Of very high [quality] painting’; the quality judgement given on Maíno’s *Magdalene* by the compiler of a goods inventory for Canon Juan Matute in 1628: Barrio Moya 1991, 183.

2 Ruiz Gómez 2009a.

3 Harris 1935, 333–39; Angulo Íñiguez and Pérez Sánchez 1969, 299–325. For the most comprehensive and up-to-date summary of Maíno studies, see Ruiz Gómez 2009a, 17–29.

4 This was also repeated in a scant biography written by Juan Agustín Ceán Bermúdez; Ceán Bermúdez 1800, III, 99–101. For a new view on the relationship between Maíno and El Greco, see Knox 2019.

The Penitent Magdalene (c. 1609–13?)

The *Penitent Magdalene* [fig. 3.5] is undoubtedly the most exciting of Maíno's newly attributed paintings. The protagonist is set in a stony, dark landscape, just outside the cave of Saint-Baume where, according to legend, she retreated after her conversion. The woman's image centres the painting, and her person seems to emanate light, through her translucent skin and her sumptuous red-velvet drapery. She is perhaps the most dazzling female figure ever painted by Maíno. A more sustained look at her surroundings allows us to identify the actual source of light. This is obviously the light of God, coming from above, while the woman at the centre is the Magdalene, holding a book, with a silver ointment jar by her side. The centrality of the Magdalene is unintentional, since Maíno had originally painted a wider canvas which was subsequently cut by a later owner. We know this from material evidence (the canvas shows this loss) and from examining its iconography: several of the recurring attributes of the Penitent Magdalene are missing, particularly the crucifix and the skull. A further painting [see fig. 3.7] with the same subject, published by Benito Navarrete Prieto and likely to be a good-quality copy, shows the missing parts of the canvas, including a crucifix in the background, a skull in the foreground and other details that reveal that this Magdalene went beyond the usual commonplaces of its time, as we will see.³²

Previous ownership

It is a rare event when a painting like this can be identified in an early modern inventory. We owe this finding to José Luis Barrio Moya, who in 1991 published the inventory of Juan de Matute, Canon of Granada Cathedral and protonotary of Pope Urban VIII.³³ Maíno's *Magdalene* had not yet been identified as being by his hand, as the painting had only resurfaced on the art market in 1990, at which point it was attributed to a 'follower of Caravaggio' and tentatively dated to 1620.³⁴ The picture had been exhibited just a few months prior to this sale at the *Mirari* exhibition

32 Navarrete Prieto 2003. See also Navarrete Prieto 2008, 39–41. The painting has since been acquired by the Museo de Bellas Artes de Asturias in Oviedo.

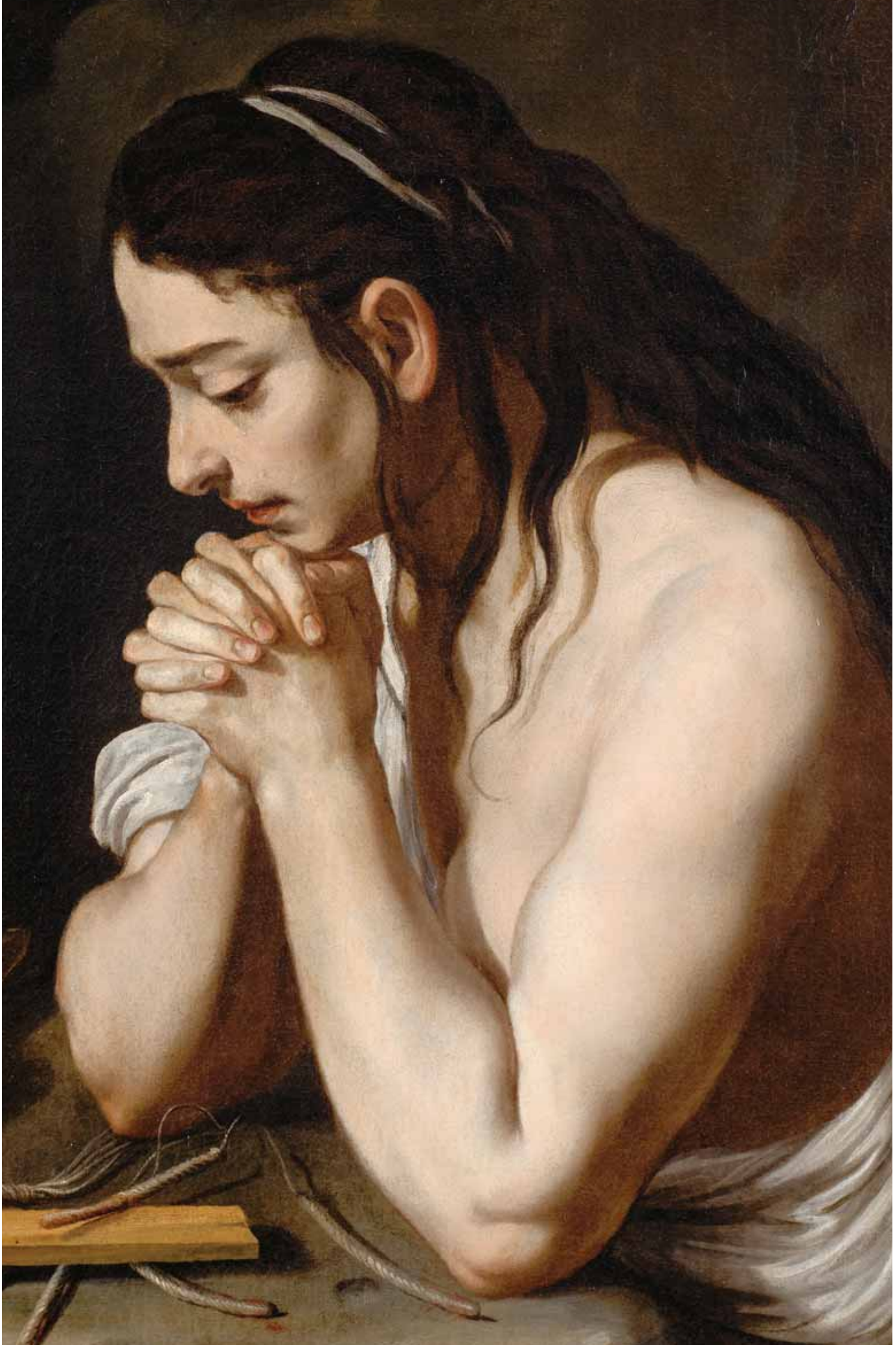
33 Barrio Moya 1991, 181–83.

34 Peel 1990, lot 12.



Fig. 3.9 Caravaggio, *The Penitent Magdalene*, 1594–95, oil on canvas, 122.5 × 98.5 cm. Galleria Doria Pamphilj, Rome

Bellori, one of Caravaggio’s early biographers, found the subordination of the main subject infuriating. Caravaggio’s Magdalene was, he complained, just ‘a girl on a chair’ (*fanciulla a sedere sopra una seggiola*); the artist had ‘feigned her as a Magdalene’ (*la finse per Maddalena*) by just adding some



CHAPTER 4

LUIS TRISTÁN (c. 1585–1624)

‘His style was very frank and liberal’
Jusepe Martínez, *Discursos*, c. 1675¹

‘Fortune did not reward him as he deserved’, lamented his early biographer, Jusepe Martínez.² The Toledo-born painter Luis Tristán de Escamilla was certainly unlucky in one major respect – his name has gone down in history as the most famous of El Greco’s pupils.³ But Tristán was much more than just a pupil. Several studies from the last century to the present have shown that he was in fact an accomplished master in his own right, with originality and skill, in addition to being socially and culturally ambitious, living a thriving existence in both Rome and Toledo. According to Fernando Marías, he was ‘El Greco’s only true artistic successor’, as, ‘rather than being untrue to his master, Tristán took his own style forward in the only way that this period would allow for the kind of artist he wanted to be, by following the route El Greco had shown him: by being original and not a servile copyist.’⁴

A quick comparative glance at two *Trinities* painted by pupil [fig. 4.1] and master [fig. 4.2] reveals both their differences and their similarities. Tristán

1 ‘Tuvo su manera muy franca y liberal’; Martínez 2006, 292.

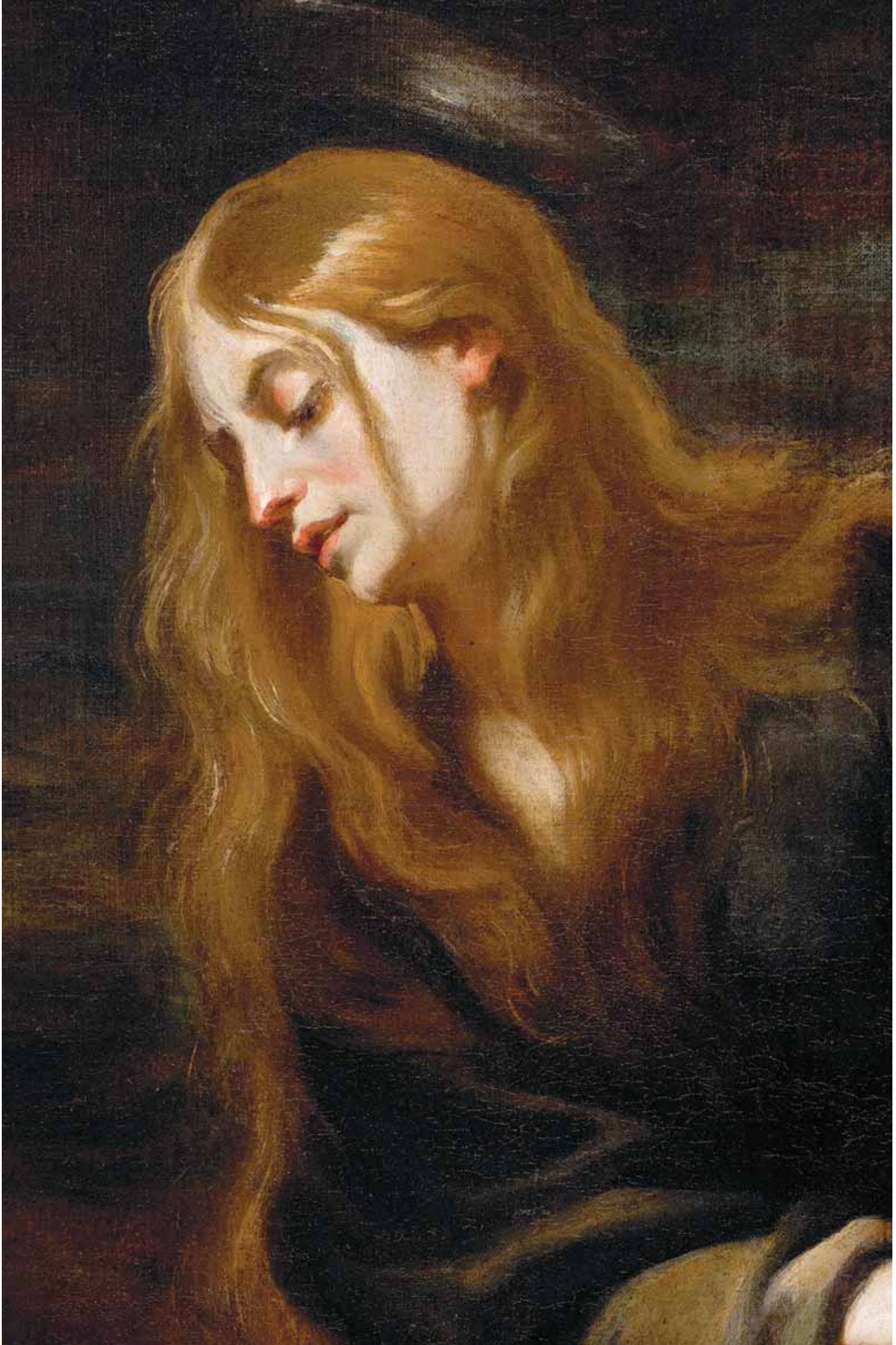
2 ‘No le siguió la fortuna en el premio como merecía’; *ibid.*

3 Essential for Tristán are Angulo Íñiguez and Pérez Sánchez 1972, III–99; Pérez Sánchez and Navarrete Prieto 2001.

4 Marías 2013, 246.



Figs 4.9 Unknown artist, 'Hand Gestures', etching in John Bulwer, *Chirologia: or the Natural Language of the Hand*, London, Tho. Harper, 1644. Wellcome Library, London



CHAPTER 5

MATEO CEREZO THE YOUNGER (1637–1666)

‘Not bad for a Spaniard’

Antonio Palomino,

*El museo pictórico
y escala óptica*, 1724¹

Born over fifty years after Tristán and Maíno, in Burgos, Mateo Cerezo Delgado, known as Cerezo the Younger (*el Joven*), never visited Italy.² His style is eclectic, blending echoes of a Titianesque palette with Flemish art, specifically that of Rubens’s pupils Anthony van Dyck and, to a lesser extent, Jacob Jordaens. Within the larger context of early modern Spanish art, and following Alfonso E. Pérez Sánchez’s historicisation of the latter, Cerezo sits within the second generation of painters of what he labels ‘full Baroque’ (*pleno Barroco*). The main painters of this time, the ‘Madrid reformers’, were Francisco Rizi, Francisco Camilo and the second master of Cerezo, Juan Carreño de Miranda.³ Cerezo would leave Burgos in order to mature into a court artist, specialising in religious painting and alternating between large public pictures – including his famous *Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine* of 1660 [fig. 5.1] – and smaller pictures to satisfy a demanding market of private collectors. These smaller pictures included still lifes (*bodegones*) and devout images of a single figure. It is in this latter context that his Bishop Auckland picture of *The Penitent Magdalene* [see fig. 5.4] was painted.

1 ‘Per essere d’un spagnolo non è cattivo’; Palomino 1724, II, 62.

2 Essential secondary literature on Cerezo the Younger is: Tormo 1927; Buendía and Gutiérrez Pastor 1986; Piedra Adarves 2000; Payo Hernanz 2020.

3 Pérez Sánchez 2019, 282.

The Penitent Magdalene

‘Another Magdalene by Cerezo! She had loved to such an extent, the beautiful sinner, that it was right that she was much loved and for a long time, by artists and poets’.

Willem Bürger, quoting Count Gessler,
Russian ambassador to Madrid, 1869²⁰

By the time Mateo Cerezo was painting his *Magdalenes* [figs. 5.2, 5.3 and fig. 5.4], the popularity of the saint had peaked. However, there was still a huge demand for depictions of the saint in repentance, and Cerezo was able to establish three successful ‘prototypes’, deriving in part from Northern prints, blending the characteristic *Tiziano*–Flemish style that had made



Fig. 5.2 Mateo Cerezo, *The Penitent Magdalene*, c. 1665–66, oil on canvas, 135 × 115 cm. Museo de Burgos



Fig. 5.3 Mateo Cerezo, *The Penitent Magdalene*, 1666, oil on canvas, 100 × 174 cm. Hermandad del Refugio, Madrid

20 ‘Encore une Madeleine de Cerezo! Elle avait tant aimé, cette belle pécheresse, qu’il était juste qu’elle fut aimée, longtemps et beaucoup, par le poètes et les artistes’; Bürger 1869, 2 (*sub vocem*).