

# NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

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\*\*PRESS PREVIEW:  
TUESDAY, JUNE 29, 1982  
10:00 A.M.-3:00 P.M.

## EL GRECO EXHIBITION BEGINS U.S. TOUR JULY 2 AT NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

WASHINGTON, D.C. June 16, 1982. Under the high patronage of His Majesty Juan Carlos I of Spain and President Ronald Reagan, El Greco of Toledo, an international loan exhibition of 57 paintings, opens in the National Gallery of Art's East Building on July 2. Since its opening in April 1982 at the Prado in Madrid, El Greco of Toledo has drawn unprecedented attendance, as many as 15,000 people a day.

On view at the National Gallery until September 6, 1982, this exhibition presents new scholarship on El Greco, on his work in Toledo, and on the city of Toledo itself, which supports a more factual and realistic interpretation of his work.

El Greco of Toledo has been organized by the Toledo Museum of Art in cooperation with the Museo del Prado, the National Gallery of Art, and the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts. The exhibition has been made possible by a generous grant from the American Express Foundation. Additional support

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has been provided by the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

Drawn from monasteries, churches, U.S. and foreign museums, and private collections, the exhibition is the most comprehensive collection of El Greco's paintings ever assembled.

Selected and organized to reflect the full scope of El Greco's oeuvre, the paintings to be exhibited include secular subjects, sections of major altarpieces, devotional works, landscapes, and portraits. The exhibition presents works from the known periods of El Greco's creative life--from his formative years in Italy to his early commissions in Toledo to paintings completed just before his death.

The Gallery's installation was designed by Gaillard Ravenel and Mark Leithauser, with special assistance from William Jordan, a leading U.S. El Greco scholar. Presented in seven sections, the exhibition reflects thematic and chronologic concerns.

The first section is devoted to El Greco in Italy and includes those paintings which demonstrate the influence on him of Italian painters. Having studied the Byzantine style of icon painting, Domenikos Theotokopoulos left his native Crete at the age of 27 and traveled to Venice. There he remade his art by following the examples of Titian, Tintoretto, and other Venetian painters.

In 1570, "The Greek," as he became known, went to Rome and studied the high Renaissance masters. Michelangelo's knowledge and dynamic handling of human anatomy particularly impressed him. The most important surviving painting from El Greco's years in Rome, Purification of the Temple, lent by the Minneapolis Institute of Art, recalls the Venetian influence--vivid color and lively brushwork--as well as larger scale and firm modeling of form reminiscent of the Central Italian masters. Among the eleven rarely seen paintings from private collections is Boy Lighting a Candle. The use of nocturnal lighting effects makes this one of the most notable paintings from El Greco's formative years in Italy.

In 1576 or 1577 El Greco left Italy for Spain, where he hoped to obtain patronage from the Court of Philip II. But he had to wait until 1580 before receiving his single royal commission. By that time, he had settled in Toledo, where he lived for 37 years.

After his arrival in Toledo, El Greco began to paint in a freer, less realistic style. For example, in the Pieta, Christ's elongated proportions and contorted poses typify El Greco's characteristic handling of the human form.

Among the first works El Greco executed in Toledo is Trinity, from his great altar complex for the convent church of Santo Domingo el Antiguo. This canvas reflects the composition of an Albrecht Dürer print and the influence of Michelangelo's monumental sculpture. The picture has

recently been cleaned and restored, revealing unexpected range and depth of color. Conservation work on another painting, Madonna and Sleeping Christ Child with Saint Anne and the Infant Baptist, lent by the Museo de Santa Cruz, Toledo, has uncovered a figure in the background.

Among the exhibition's other monumental works are Annunciation, Pentecost, and Baptism of Christ. These probably were part of El Greco's commission for the Madrid College of Doña Maria de Aragon. These works, on loan from the Prado, are each more than 10 feet high, the largest canvases on view.

Among the portraits, Fray Hortensio Félix Paravicino is considered to be one of El Greco's most outstanding creations. The brushwork, so characteristic of the artist's painterly style, is free and spontaneous.

In the section of the exhibition based on images of saints, there are two paintings from the National Gallery's collection, St. Martin and the Beggar--with a view of Toledo in the background--and Madonna and Child with Saint Martina and Saint Agnes. They were originally altarpieces in the Chapel of Saint Joseph in Toledo.

Included in the section containing works from El Greco's final years is Laocoön, from the National Gallery's collection. The painting, the only surviving example of a mythological theme by the artist, places the protagonists against a Toledan landscape. Also in this section, Saint Ildefonso, represents the bravura brushwork, sparkling

color, and vibrant light and shadow of El Greco's later years.

The exhibition catalogue, published by the New York Graphic Society, is the most comprehensive book on El Greco to appear in many years. The authors, Jonathan Brown, New York University Institute of Fine Arts; Richard Kagan, Johns Hopkins University; Alfonso Pérez-Sánchez, University of Madrid; and William Jordan, Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth; leading scholars of Spanish art and history, detail the new view of El Greco and of the Spain in which he worked. The 280 page catalogue illustrates all exhibited paintings in color and contains an additional 196 color and black and white illustrations. English, Spanish, and German editions are being published.

The exhibition will travel to the Toledo Museum of Art, Ohio (September 26-November 21, 1982); and the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts (December 12, 1982-February 6, 1983).

\*\*Film crews and photographers should contact the Information Office (842-6353) in advance.

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION or photographs contact Katherine Warwick, Assistant to the Director (Information Officer), or Carolyn Engel, Information Office, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. 20565, (202) 842-6353.