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El Greco Anniversary Celebrated at National Gallery of Art, Washington, Rare Loans from Washington-Area Collections Included



El Greco (Domenikos Theotokopoulos), *Laocoön*, c. 1610/1614
oil on canvas
Samuel H. Kress Collection

Washington, DC—The 400th anniversary of El Greco's death will be remembered at the National Gallery of Art with an exhibition of 11 paintings from the Gallery, Dumbarton Oaks, and the Phillips Collection in Washington, DC, and from the Walters Art Museum, in Baltimore. On view in the West Building, gallery M-28 from November 2, 2014 through February 16, 2015, ***El Greco in the National Gallery of Art and Washington-Area Collections: A 400th Anniversary Celebration*** will include some of the artist's most beloved paintings, renowned for compositions of bold colors and subjects with dramatic expression.

"This exhibition showcases the artist's groundbreaking style of painting that fused elements of Byzantine and Renaissance art with the heightened spirituality of the Counter-Reformation," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art, Washington. "El Greco's expressive style fascinated early 20th-century American collectors who competed to acquire his paintings."

With seven paintings by El Greco (1541–1614), the Gallery has one of the largest collections of his work in the United States, made possible by the generosity of the Gallery's early benefactors Andrew W. Mellon, Samuel H. Kress, Joseph Widener, and Chester Dale.

From November 4, 2014 through February 1, 2015, New York City will commemorate the 400th anniversary of El Greco's death with two exhibitions showcasing all of the artist's work from New York public collections. The exhibitions will be on view at [The Frick Collection](#) and the [Metropolitan Museum of Art](#) (with works on loan from the Hispanic Society of America).

Exhibition Highlights

The exhibition in Washington includes works from various stages of El Greco's career—from early work in Venice to unfinished paintings made in Toledo. The exhibition is organized by the National Gallery of Art.

***Christ Cleansing the Temple* (probably before 1570, National Gallery of Art)** In this passionate work, El Greco depicted a popular theme from the Counter-Reformation: the Catholic Church's attempt to purify itself. Painted in Venice, the composition shows that El Greco was still learning to master Renaissance painting. The loose brushwork and bold colors reveal the influence of Venetian artists such as Titian and Tintoretto. El Greco signed this painting, as he did throughout his career, with his name in Greek characters.

***Saint Martin and the Beggar* (1597/1599, National Gallery of Art) and *Madonna and Child with Saint Martina and Saint Agnes* (1597/1599, NGA)** El Greco was commissioned to paint altarpieces for the Chapel of Saint Joseph in Toledo, Spain. Those for the two side altars were purchased by Philadelphia financier, collector, and Gallery benefactor Peter A. B. Widener. The paintings hung prominently in the Widener residence until 1942, when his son Joseph Widener donated them to the Gallery. Both paintings were recently cleaned to remove yellowed varnish and to reveal the original color relationships and vibrancy of El Greco's brushwork.

Saint Francis Receiving the Stigmata, (1585–1590, The Walters Art Museum) In this work, painted in Toledo, a leading center of the Counter-Reformation, El Greco portrays the founder of the Franciscan order in his monk's habit, silhouetted by a dramatic golden light and receiving the stigmata.

The Holy Family with Saint Anne and the Infant John the Baptist (c. 1595/1600, National Gallery of Art) El Greco experimented with the subject of the Holy Family in several paintings, most of which are significantly larger than this version, measuring 21 inches by 14 inches. The painting was donated to the Gallery in 1959 by the Samuel H. Kress Foundation.

The Repentant Saint Peter, (1600–1605 or later, The Phillips Collection) Images of penitent saints served to affirm the legitimacy of penitence, or confession, a sacrament scorned by Protestants but passionately defended by Catholics during the Counter-Reformation.

Saint Ildefonso (c. 1603/1614, National Gallery of Art) Edgar Degas once owned this portrait of the seventh-century archbishop of Toledo. Ildefonso, one of the city's patron saints, is shown in his study, furnished as it would have been in El Greco's time.

The Visitation (c. 1610/1614, Dumbarton Oaks) This canvas depicts the meeting between the Virgin Mary and her cousin Elizabeth, both pregnant—Mary with Jesus and Elizabeth with John the Baptist. The figures are viewed from below because the painting was conceived for the ceiling above the altar in the Church of San Vicente, Toledo. Mildred and Robert Woods Bliss purchased this work in 1936 for the renowned Music Room of their home Dumbarton Oaks.

Saint Jerome (c. 1610/1614, National Gallery of Art) In this unfinished canvas, El Greco depicts Saint Jerome—one of the Four Doctors of the Church and responsible for the Latin translation of the Bible known as the Vulgate—as a penitent, kneeling in the wilderness while clutching the bloodied rock that he used to beat his chest in repentance for his love of classical learning. This work was donated to the Gallery in 1943 by New York investment broker Chester Dale, and due to a stipulation in the bequest, the painting may be seen only at the Gallery.

Laocoön (c. 1610/1614, National Gallery of Art) No work by El Greco has inspired more controversy than his one surviving mythological painting. From the story of the Trojan horse in Virgil's *Aeneid*, El Greco's Laocoön symbolizes a number of topics from the Counter-Reformation, ranging from Christian martyrdom to criticism of the clergy. El Greco replaced Troy with a view of Toledo in the background, with a horse trotting toward one of the city's principal gates.

A visionary artist, El Greco was also a savvy businessman. As head of a large and productive studio, he oversaw the creation of numerous replicas of his most admired compositions. At least six replicas exist of El Greco's ***Saint Martin and the Beggar***; the Gallery's is included in the exhibition along with the artist's original.

El Greco (1541–1614)

Domenikos Theotokopoulos, universally known as El Greco, was born on the Greek island of Crete, where he became a master painter of Byzantine icons. Aspiring for more opportunities and success, he moved to Venice and absorbed the lessons of High Renaissance masters, especially Titian and Tintoretto. In 1570 he departed for Rome, where he studied the work of Michelangelo and encountered the style known as mannerism, one that rejected the logic and naturalism of Renaissance art.

El Greco relocated to Spain in 1576 and spent the rest of his life in Toledo, where he received major commissions that had not been available to him in Italy. Blending diverse influences—Byzantine, Renaissance, and mannerist—he developed a unique style that reflects the religious fervor of Counter-Reformation Spain.

After his death in 1614, El Greco's work fell into obscurity until early 19th-century French artists and connoisseurs began to take note of it after the Napoleonic occupation of Spain. By 1838 several of his paintings were displayed in Paris in the Spanish gallery of the Louvre. In 1902 the Prado Museum in Madrid staged El Greco's first monographic exhibition and within a decade other exhibitions would be devoted to him in Paris, Munich, Düsseldorf, and elsewhere.

At the close of the 19th century, artists striving for emotional or expressive effects found a kindred spirit in El Greco, and since that time his influence has been immense. Many have regarded him as a forerunner of modernism. Echoes of his art appear in the works of such diverse artists as Paul Cézanne, Amedeo Modigliani, Pablo Picasso, Paul Klee, Alberto Giacometti, Thomas Hart Benton, Jackson Pollock, and Francis Bacon.

General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets at Constitution Avenue NW, and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. For information call (202) 737-4215 or visit the Gallery's Web site at www.nga.gov. Follow the Gallery on Facebook at www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt, Twitter at www.twitter.com/ngadc, and Instagram at <http://instagram.com/ngadc>.

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage

and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

For additional press information please call or send inquiries to:

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Exhibition Film: *El Greco, An Artist's Odyssey*

[El Greco at The Frick Collection](#)

[El Greco in New York](#)

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