

Caylus



MASTER OF THE ZARZOSO TRIPTYCH
(active ca. 1440-1470)

Ecce Homo

Castile, mid-15th century
Oil on panel
42.5 × 31 cm

PROVENANCE:

Italy, private collection.

LITERATURE:

unpublished.

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The Master of the Triptych of El Zarzoso is one of the painters active in Castile whose reputation has been completely revised and updated in the past few years. Until very recently this artist was only known from a triptych formerly in the convent of Nuestra Señora de Portaceli del Zarzoso in El Cabaco (Salamanca), which was acquired by the Museo del Prado from the Várez Fisa collection in 2014.¹ However, a recent study by Mireia Castaño has rescued the artist from oblivion, presenting numerous previously unpublished works, all of outstanding quality, which had not previously been correctly attributed in the literature.² The *Ecce Homo* with Caylus that is the subject of this report represents a new addition to the corpus of a master who should now be considered one of the key links in the introduction of the Flemish language into Castilian painting, alongside already very well known artist such as Jorge Inglés and the Master of Lupiana.

DESCRIPTION

This is a small-format work (42.5 x 31 cm) which is painted on both sides. It was probably intended for private devotion. The front has an impressive, close-up depiction of the *Ecce Homo*. He is dressed in a simple red tunic and is shown bust-length in front of a very simplified white ledge. The tone and colour of that architectural element is the same as that of the background of the image, a detail that will be discussed later in this text. Christ is shown slightly inclined to one side, his head and body turned towards the viewer's right. His face conveys total exhaustion following the torture he has endured as part of his martyrdom. His brow is furrowed and his eyes half-closed, looking down and with pronounced dark, heavily lined circles under them. The level of detail in the eyes is exceptional, including elements such as the tear ducts and the delicate treatment of the eyelids, which have small veins running across them. The very long eyelashes are painted hair by hair, as are the eyebrows, which are thicker towards the nose and thinner at the outer ends. All these details indicate a desire for realism and precision on the artist's part which is also evident in other aspects: for example, the application of delicate highlights using white pigment in areas such as the forehead and the space between the eyebrows in order to define the wrinkles that give the face its expressivity. Similar subtle brushstrokes are present on the nose and upper lip. This message is reinforced with the tonal

¹ SILVA 2013; SILVA 2015.

² CASTAÑO 2022.

gradation of Christ's skin, which ranges from the lightness of the left side of the face to the darker shadow of the right side. The painter also emphasised the nasolabial furrows that run from the nose down to the mouth. The latter is slightly open, revealing the teeth and conveying Christ's weariness, while the lips are thin rather than fleshy and are striking for their vivid red colour.

The manner of depicting the hair and beard also reflect this interest in realism. It is evident in the moustache, for example, which almost disappears in the central part to reveal the philtrum and the curved line of the upper lip, while its two tips are formed of wavy hairs. These hairs are painted individually as is the beard, which is forked at the tip and has a markedly blended base that gives it all its volume. The right ear is almost entirely visible, only covered at the top by the main body of the hair and across the middle by an individual lock. Christ's hair is long and thick, falling over his shoulders and painted with similar care and detail. The volume of the hair is emphasised by a type of gradation on both sides where it seemingly becomes lighter in order to create a sense of pictorial depth.

The crown of thorns on Christ's head is one of the most striking elements of the composition. Tied with green cords, the branches of which it is made have sinuous, tortuous shapes. Although most of the thorns are pointing downwards, some press harshly into Christ's forehead, making the blood spurt out and run, in large quantities down the sides of his face. Once again, the artist reveals a concern for precision and realism through details such as the way the blood runs over the rope round Christ's neck and stains his tunic, making it a darker red colour and thus distinguishing it from the fabric. The artist was meticulously careful in its depiction, applying precise brushstrokes of a more brilliant red to the drips and splashes of blood in order to give it more volume and intensity. The rope also reflects the same criteria of lifelikeness, both with regard to the intention to differentiate the individual fibres of which it is made and in the way it falls over the ledge in a type of trompe l'oeil. It casts its own shadows, another of the numerous details that reveal this painter's skills and high quality. Finally, the white background helps to make the figure stand out within the composition, giving rise to a chromatic contrast intended to focus the viewer's attention on the dramatic, pathos-filled and sorrowful image of Christ.

The reverse of the painting has an interesting depiction of the five wounds of the Passion arranged on an open book (fig.1). This representation does not follow the arrangement of the image on the front, as the panel has to be turned 90 degrees in order to see it correctly. The central wound is that of Christ's side, from which the most blood flows. As on the front, the painter employed the maximum degree of care and precision, evident in the use of two different tones of red in the drips of blood in order to transmit the sense of volume. In addition, and as already observed with regard to the eyebrows, the artist's intention here was to emphasize the impression of realism by depicting small veins across the surface of the wound while adding shading to its edges. In contrast, the other four wounds are painted in a more summary manner at the corners of the image and in a button-like shape. The two in the upper part are not present in their entirety, indicating that the panel has been cut down slightly at one edge. With regard to the open book on which they are located, the undulating form of the double page that houses the image is clearly visible in the lower part and just below it the book's gilded fore edges decorated with diamonds and crosses. It is also possible to see the pink front and back covers, which come together in a central fold.

TECHNICAL ASPECTS

The technical study of this panel undertaken by Icono I & R in 2022³ has made it possible to draw a series of interesting conclusions. Firstly, the panel was not painted on pine, the wood most commonly used by 15th-century Spanish painters, but on wood of a broad-leafed tree. However, the fact that there is painting on the reverse makes it impossible to determine the exact type of support. With regard to the binder used, although the results were not definitive it would seem to be an egg tempera with the addition of a certain quantity of drying oil. This can be confirmed by the physical examination of work's the pictorial surface, which reveals brushstrokes characteristic of tempera. This indicates that the artist did not use oil, which became widespread in the Spanish context around the end of the 15th century, suggesting that this is an artist of the previous generation, active around the middle of the 15th century.

³ Report by Rafael Romero Asenjo dated 21 July 2022.

The infra-red reflectograph confirmed an element that can be seen with the naked eye on the front of the panel: namely the presence in the initial design of a background curtain which the artist himself subsequently covered over with a white background in what can be termed a *pentimento* (fig. 2). This is a curtain that occupies almost the entire background except the edges and which was held up with small trips of fictive fabric at the top. The stratigraphic study also showed the presence of gilding, which could suggest that the curtain was painted using that technique and that the artist eventually concealed it beneath a white layer. It is possible that the type of yellowish gradation that surrounds much of Christ's head is the result of these changes made by the painter to the original work. It is not, however, known whether this gradation relates to the earlier existence of a gilded halo associated with the rays that are clearly visible in the infra-red image in three specific places around the edge of the head. Other *pentimenti* include changes to the position of many of the thorns in the crown, and also to the position and width of the knot in the rope.

Another interesting aspect of the results of the technical study is the under-drawing. The infra-red image showed "exhaustive and complex under-drawing in the form of fine parallel lines that suggest hatching and volumes. This hatching is faint and is more visible if the image is enlarged. It can be clearly observed on the eyebrows, eyelids, nose and cheekbones. This is a type of under-drawing more characteristic of 15th-century works than that used in the following century when hatching was rarely used and artists essentially focused on defining outlines rather than on parallel hatching". This is a type of drawing habitually employed in working practices characteristic of the Spanish, Late Gothic tradition but one that disappeared in the 16th century when artists focused on defining outlines and also included more summary parallel hatching.⁴ The precision of this analysis makes it possible to locate the artist's activity in a very specific context and it should be interpreted in parallel to the fact that the painting was executed with a tempera binding, together making it possible to identify this painter as a 15th-century artist of Late Gothic affiliation.

⁴ This information derived from Rafael Romero Asenjo's report (see note 4).

ICONOGRAPHY

With regard to the format of the work, its two-sided nature and the subjects depicted on each side, it is evident that this is not a panel from an altarpiece but a work of great expressive power intended for private devotion and created to emotionally move the devout person praying before it. This is achieved in a number of ways, including the notable detail of the execution, which undoubtedly aims to present a pathos-filled image of the Son of God through realism. As already noted, particular attention is placed on details such as the veins of the eyebrows, the wrinkles and the individual hairs, all enhanced by the importance given to the blood and to Christ's melancholy gaze. Images of this type,⁵ including the depictions known as the Man of Sorrows, the "Ecce Homo", the Pietà and all those which show Christ's wounds and suffering during his Passion, were very widely disseminated in the 15th century as the result of the spread of the *devotio moderna* throughout Europe. This was a series of religious contemplative practices of empathetic content that aimed to make the devout person relive Christ's experience of his Passion; feeling in their own skin and deep within them his pain and suffering during his martyrdom. This would be experienced through intimate prayer and by reading Christological texts⁶ such as the *Meditationes Vitae Christi*. As a result, these are particularly pathos-filled and physically violent images which aimed to arouse the emotions of the person located before them. The *Ecce Homo* is a particularly apt image for achieving these ends, hence the fact that the present work can be associated with the above-mentioned devotional and pious context.

The depiction on the reverse of the panel further reinforces all the above. The iconography of the Blood of Christ and the Five Wounds, "four of them from the nails, the fifth from the lance", in the words of Gonzalo de Berceo,⁷ was developed in Europe in the context of the influence of mystics and spiritual writers such as Saint Bonaventure, Saint Catherine of Siena and Saint Bridget of Sweden and in parallel with the great veneration to them manifested by Christians as they reinforced the Son of God's humanity. The Franciscan Order played a major role in these cults as its founder, Saint

⁵ See HAND 1992; SUREDA 2017.

⁶On these issues, see MOLINA 2000. For the Castilian context, see also FRANCO 1999.

⁷ BERCEO 1981, p. 223.

Francis of Assisi, had personally received the stigmata of the crucified Christ.⁸ The ultimate consequence was the foundation of confraternities that organized, for example, penitential processions in which the faithful mortified their own bodies in order to empathize at first hand with the suffering inflicted on Christ during his Passion, given that the wounds and blood were the consequence and justification of that martyrdom. On some occasions these processions had five Stations that commemorated the number of wounds. These elements were also associated with the Cross and the Crucifixion, the moment when the Son of God was sacrificed to redeem humanity, hence their direct association with the Eucharist. We also encounter a profound veneration for all relics relating to the Passion, particularly those associated with the blood of Christ and its spilling.⁹

From the mid-15th century onwards, numerous images were produced of Christ's face in the Flemish manner. In the Spanish context many of them were imported works deriving from trade with the Low Countries which functioned as the models for images by Spanish painters affiliated with the Late Gothic aesthetic. Most of the surviving examples, date from the late 15th century, such as the panel by Bartolomé Bermejo in the Royal Chapel in Granada, the only surviving element from a polyptych that belonged to Isabella the Catholic.¹⁰ Bermejo's panel has an interesting element in common with the present work as it is also two-sided, including an image of the Adoration of the Magi. In that case there is evidence of a system of hinges which allowed for the different panels that made up the polyptych to move, a feature that does not apply to the present work as it does not seem to have been part of any larger work and rather functioned independently. Nonetheless, there are numerous formal parallels with the present panel as the type of frontal representation is very comparable, showing Christ in a red tunic, with a forked beard, crown of thorns and abundant blood running down his face. The only notable difference is that there is a sturdy chain around his neck rather than a rope. The Flemish nature of Bermejo's work is reinforced by the halo of rays which, as noted above, the present artist considered including in this panel. All these characteristics reappear in a painting that has been associated with the one by Bermejo, the *Holy Face* by

⁸ For the Franciscans and the Five Wounds, see QUESADA 2017, p. 176ff.

⁹ On these issues, see LABARGA 1999; RAMON 2018, p. 306ff

¹⁰ On that work, see VELASCO 2018.

Joan Gascó in the Museu Episcopal in Vic.¹¹ That work also offers a good parallel with the present one, although it is slightly later. The exact origins of these very expressive depictions of the suffering of Christ, in which he has blood-tinged eyes and tears running down his cheeks are not known but they may recall images disseminated in Italy around 1430-50 by painters such as Fra Angelico.¹²

THE MASTER OF THE ZARZOSO TRIPTYCH

With regard to the attribution of the present panel, as noted above an analysis of the painter's style allows for the conclusion that this is an unpublished work by the Master of the Triptych of El Zarzoso, an artist originating from north of the Pyrenees and active in Castile between 1440 and 1470. Firstly, it should be noted that this attribution is not a straightforward one as no other work of similar format and subject is known. Nor among those by this artist to have survived are there any that include a completely comparable figure or face. It should also be noted that the present panel is a small-scale work intended for private devotion while the other known creations by this artist are panels from large-scale altarpieces or other types of small altarpieces such as triptychs. This should be borne in mind as the latter are paintings created on the basis of criteria different to the present one. In this sense they are less detailed and realistic in their approach, whereas this *Ecce Homo* is precisely notable for being highly finished down to the smallest detail, revealing the notable quality and abilities of its creator.

The artist's best-known work and the one from which his name derives is the triptych from the convent of Nuestra Señora de Portaceli del Zarzoso in El Cabaco (Salamanca), now in the Museo Nacional del Prado (fig. 3 and 4). It includes faces that can be compared to that of the present Christ given that they have identical formal features. Examples include the saints on the exterior of the lateral wings of the triptych: Saint James the Greater, Saint Anthony of Padua, Saint John the Baptist and Saint Dominic of Guzmán. All of them have languid gazes and the same fine lines around the eyes, very long eyelashes with individually painted lashes, very thick eyebrows that are bushier towards the nose and above all a marked glabella (the space between the

¹¹ MIRAMBELL 2003.

¹² BORCHERT 2002, p. 255, no. 84; SUREDA 2017, pp. 207-208.

eyebrows), with concave and convex forms in the areas adjoining the brows. The figures in the triptych also have very similar noses with long thick septums and a white line painted on the left to create a highlight. The faces have very pronounced cheekbones which are given volume through the powerful shading also found on the present Christ. In contrast to the latter, however, none of those figures have half-open mouths revealing their teeth although the lips are of comparable form and tend to convey melancholy expressions. Another point of coincidence is the presence of nasolabial furrows that run diagonally down from the lower part of the nose.

In the case of Saint James the Greater, the hair has been defined in a manner similar to the present Christ with regard to both the curls and the forked beard, with a comparable gradation and a similar accumulation of hairs under the lower lip. Again similarly, the moustache almost disappears in the zone of the furrow of the philtrum. Saint John the Baptist has very similar curly hair while Saint Anthony of Padua's ear is of a comparable shape with a slightly elongated lobule, lightly defined tragus and pointed antitragus. The concha is relatively large in both cases and the helix and antihelix are narrow and run almost in parallel. It should be added that the saints in the triptych have haloes applied with mordent gilding, with rays similar to those originally intended by the artist of the present panel but which he finally rejected, as evident in the infra-red image. Finally, the much more detailed, realist treatment of the present Christ in comparison to the saints on the lateral wings of the El Zarzoso triptych can be explained by the much smaller size of the present panel, which was intended to be seen from much closer up.

With regard to the principal panel of the triptych, which depicts *The Nativity*, the treatment of the Virgin's hair is very similar to that of the present Christ in the area of the ear, with curls of similar form and identical highlights, as well as stray hairs over the front of the ear. For his part Saint Joseph has a face that reveals some similarity with Christ's, particularly with regard to the lines on the forehead, the area of the ears and above all the glabella or space between the eyebrows. That element reveals the same use of concave and convex forms in the zone between the eyebrows and we also find the same "u" shape in the centre. These very distinctive details should be considered traits characteristic of the painter and fundamental elements for precisely defining his style in terms of a Morellian methodology. Joseph's ear is also very similar to Christ's. Finally,

the panel of *The Presentation of Christ in the Temple* also features bearded male faces that are comparable to the present Christ with regard to all the elements discussed above.

One of the most convincing parallels for proposing an attribution of the present work to the Master of the Triptych of El Zarzoso is the *Crucified Christ* in the monastery of Guadalupe (Cáceres), in which Christ's face reveals numerous similarities (fig. 5). The face conveys a similar expressivity; marked by suffering, with the mouth slightly open to show the teeth and blood gushing down the forehead and sides of the cheeks. Both faces are modelled with similar blending in the area of the cheekbones, which is much more precise in the present case. The crown of thorns is more summarily defined in the Guadalupe panel but the hairs are executed in a similar technique, including the type of gradation used for the hair on either side of the head and which is also to be found in the hair that falls down to the level of the breast in the Guadalupe painting. The Crucified Christ's moustache is almost absent in the central zone, revealing the furrow of the philtrum while the sides of the moustache are again made up of individualised hairs of undulating form. Finally, it should be noted once again that the more defined, precise realism of the present work reflects its small format, which allowed for much more complex and realistic finishes.

Similar conclusions can be reached if Christ's face in the present work is compared to the one in the *Lamentation before the dead Christ* in the Museo Nacional del Prado (fig. 6), which was also formerly in the monastery of Guadalupe and also reveals connections with the above-mentioned *Crucified Christ* formerly in that religious house. The face is again of the same human type and thus provides another excellent comparison with the present work. In *The Lamentation* the face of the bearded figure on the left also reveals some parallels, including the shape of the eyes, the lines around them and the furrowed brow.

There is no doubt that the attribution of this *Ecce Homo* to the Master of the Triptych of El Zarzoso represents a significant contribution not just to knowledge of that artist but also to painting produced in Castile at a transitional period between the International Gothic and Late Gothic Flemish realism. This is a painter who arrived from north of the Pyrenees, as Gudiol noted,¹³ and who was destined to become one of the key figures for an explanation of the introduction of the northern pictorial language into Castilian

¹³ GUDIOL 1970, who considered him a French artist.

painting, as also noted by Mireia Castaño in her study of the painter.¹⁴ As that expert deduced, this is a master who worked for important clients among the Castilian nobility, such as the Zúñiga, making use of a notably individual and innovative style which contributed to the renewal of painting in Castile between approximately 1440 and 1470. The addition to the artist's corpus of the present *Ecce Homo* allows for some connections to be made with Castaño's arguments as this is a work not made for a church altar but for a private space, possibly one belonging to one of the artist's aristocratic clients.

It was Josep Gudiol Ricart who first referred to this painter and defined his artistic personality when in 1970 he published the triptych that had remained until 1965 in the convent of Nuestra Señora de Portaceli del Zarzoso in El Cabaco (Salamanca),¹⁵ a religious house of the female Franciscan Order founded in 1444 by Gómez de Benavides, Lord of Matilla, Frómista, Zarzoso and Zarsosillo. The triptych may thus have entered the convent shortly after its foundation.¹⁶ However, the exterior of the lateral wings do not feature the coat-of-arms of Gómez de Benavides but rather of the Zúñigas, combined with those of the Osorios in a single device that appears twice. These arms can only be associated with Elvira de Zúñiga, who was married for the second time to Pedro Álvarez de Osorio, Count of Trastámara and Lord of Villalobos (died 1461).¹⁷ The recent rediscovery of Elvira de Zúñiga's will has helped to establish the date of the triptych and thus the painter's chronology more precisely. On the basis of the recently rediscovered will the triptych can be dated to around 1448, the date the document was written.¹⁸ The triptych is now in the Museo del Prado, where it entered from the Várez Fisa Collection.¹⁹

The principal scene of the triptych depicts *The Nativity*, while the wings have an upper and lower level with scenes from the Life of the Virgin and of Christ. As noted above, the exterior faces of the lateral wings have full-length depictions of various saints. Although not previously mentioned in the literature, the format of the interior of the wings with two scenes on each conforms to a type of altarpiece that was notably

¹⁴ CASTAÑO 2022.

¹⁵ GUDIOL 1970.

¹⁶ SILVA 2013, p. 30.

¹⁷ As proposed in SILVA 2015, p. 18.

¹⁸ CASTAÑO 2022, p. 110.

¹⁹ SILVA 2013; SILVA 2015.

common in the context of 15th- and 16th-century Spain. This has been studied by Didier Martens, who argued that it was the preferred type among Spanish clients as the subdivision of the wings into different scenes increased the sense of narrativity and ensured that small Flemish triptychs - or triptychs of Flemish appearance such as this one - resembled large wall-mounted altarpieces to some degree.²⁰ It is thus significant that a non-Spanish painter active in Castile adopted this structural solution in order to organize the triptych he painted for the convent of El Zarzoso.

Mireia Castaño's recent study of the painter, referred to various times in this text, has resulted in a complete reassessment of the master and a notable step forward with regard to knowledge of him as it has added a series of works to his previously small corpus that have necessitated a reconsideration of his figure in the context of the introduction of the Flemish style into Castile. In other words, in the light of these new attributions the artist needs to be seen as a much more significant one than previously imagined. Among these new works are three panels of *The Lamentation*, *The three Marys at the Tomb*, and *The Nativity* from the monastery of Guadalupe (Cáceres) (figs. 7 and 8). The first is now in the Museo Nacional del Prado while the other two are in a private collection.²¹ Other new attributions include a panel of *The Virgin and Child enthroned with a female Saint and Saint Jerome* in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (51.8 x 34.9 cm)²² a *Virgin and Child with a female Donor* that was formerly with the art dealer Raimundo Ruiz; a *Lamentation* on the Florentine art market in 1908; two panels of *The Lamentation* and *The Nativity* recently auctioned in Brussels (Pierre Bergé & Associés, 19 June 2019, lot 32, 45.5 x 22 cm each); and a *Crucified Christ* still in the monastery of Guadalupe,²³ a location that led Castaño to associate it with the group of three panels divided between the Museo del Prado and a private collection, as all were originally in the same religious house. As that expert has noted, the monastery of Guadalupe was particularly favoured by different members of the Zúñiga family, including the above-mentioned Elvira, the possible patron of the triptych of El Zarzoso, once again suggesting her connection with the master and some of his works.²⁴

²⁰ On structures of this type, see MARTENS, 2010, pp. 25-97.

²¹ CASTAÑO 2022, pp. 112-115.

²² CASTAÑO 2022, pp. 116-117; BERG 1996.

²³ On these works, see CASTAÑO 2022, pp. 116-119.

²⁴ CASTAÑO 2022, p. 119.

Based on the above it can thus be emphasized that there are two works by the artist with known provenances; one from the area of Salamanca and the other from Cáceres, which allows for an initial area of activity to be defined. In addition, both were in religious houses associated with the noble Zúniga family and specifically with a prominent member of that family, Elvira de Zúniga, for whom the artist could have been among her most favoured. It should be added that connections have been observed between some works now attributed to the Master of the Triptych of El Zarzoso and Sevillian painting, specifically artists such as Juan Sánchez de Castro.²⁵ These connections are certainly evident and other names that could be mentioned include Pedro Sánchez I, the painter of a *Lamentation* now in a private collection, and Juan Sánchez de San Román, to whom a *Christ on the Route to Calvary* currently on the Madrid art market (Galería Bernat) is attributed.²⁶ These connections suggest the possibility that the artist was particularly active in Andalusia.

The format of many of these painter's works indicates a master who specialised in small-format commissions for private clients; works undoubtedly intended for devotional purposes within a private home. This format and function correspond to the present painting, the panels in the Metropolitan Museum, *The Virgin and Child with a female Donor* formerly with Raimundo Ruiz, *The Lamentation* on the Florentine art market in 1908, and the two panels sold at auction in Brussels; all small-format works, some of which include depictions of their respective donors.

This painter's output is relatively close to that of another artist recently identified in the literature and known as the "Master of Lupiana"; a similarly key figure for this period of transition towards the Late Gothic pictorial language in Castile. He was identified and defined by Ángel Fuentes on the basis of two panels from the principal altarpiece in the Hieronymite monastery of San Bartolomé in Lupiana (Guadalajara) now in the Museo del Guadalajara (an *Ecce Homo*) and the Museo del Prado (*Christ before Pilate*). The altarpiece, which must have been particularly monumental in scale, was funded by Aldonza, Duchess of Mendoza. Fuentes considers its creator to have been an artist born and trained in northern Europe who moved to Spain and worked for noble families

²⁵ BERG 1996.

²⁶ On both works, see VELASCO 2020, p. 17, fig. 5 and pp. 64-69, respectively.

around the mid-15th century,²⁷ a case thus comparable to that of the Master of the Triptych of El Zarzoso.

Again, with regard to the recent reassessment of the introduction of the northern pictorial idiom into Castile, connections have recently been established between Jorge Inglés, traditionally considered the artist to have introduced the Flemish *ars nova* into Castile, and other lesser-known masters such as the above-mentioned Master of Lupiana and the Master of the Triptych of El Zarzoso. This new reading of their output has been undertaken on the basis of the stylistic and compositional connections that their works manifest with regard to the Germanic context and which should be added to the evident Flemish influence they reveal. In Molina's words: "The pronounced reliefs, vigorous drawing and almost expressionist lines of the faces make Inglés an interpreter rather than a representative of Flemish formulas and bring him close to solutions observable in the Germanic world."²⁸ These characteristics can be applied to the two anonymous masters referred to here and allow us to refer to a very distinctive and unique aesthetic *koiné* not previously taken into account. This does not deny the Flemish character of their compositions and style but it allows for the idea of a possible assimilation of that Flemish element via the German route.

Whether or not this is the case, while the Master of the Triptych of El Zarzoso reveals evident connections with the International Gothic language and the northern idiom is only more superficially apparent in his work, in the cases of Jorge Inglés and the Master of Lupiana their aesthetic proposals are fully rooted in northern realism from the outset. What is most significant, however, is the fact that the reassessment of the Master of the Triptych of El Zarzoso in the context of Late Gothic Castilian painting has meant that Jorge Inglés is no longer considered to bear the sole responsibility for introducing the *ars nova* into Castile, as it has been demonstrated that he was not an isolated painter in the context of Castile who brought about this change, nor was he the first to incorporate northern realism into his work.²⁹

²⁷ FUENTES 2021.

²⁸ MOLINA 2022, pp. 89-90.

²⁹ MOLINA 2022, p. 94.

With regard to the present painter's non-Spanish origins, Gudiol noted that he could have been from France given the similarities with Nicolás Francés (documented 1434-68), another painter of that origin active during this period in Castile. Gudiol added that the present artist could have had connections with manuscript illumination, essentially due to the evident interest in anecdotal elements and in detail in some of the scenes of the El Zarzoso triptych.³⁰ Similarly, Silva saw connections with the Flemish world (specifically, with Tournai) in episodes such as *The Nativity*, which reveals clear connections with slightly earlier compositions by Robert Campin. That artist could also be referred to with regard to scenes such as *The Birth of the Virgin*, which includes a midwife stirring a cooking pot inside a wrought iron brazier or the pair of clogs with pseudo-Kufic decoration that also appear in the triptych's principal scene. Even more striking are the Black angels helping Mary to ascend to the heavens in the scene of *The Ascension*.³¹

This interest in minor details, which is present in all the panels of the El Zarzoso triptych, connects with the visual culture of Flemish masters of the first generation, such as Robert Campin, Jacques Caret and Rogier van der Weyden. It became one of the defining characteristics of this master and is another indication of the skill and abilities of a painter trained in northern Europe who was familiar with specific types of works including, for example, devotional paintings. The present *Ecce Homo* corresponds to that typology and its format, astonishing realism and detail all point to Flemish influences. It can be concluded that an artist who already paid great attention to details in his larger works would inevitably have done the same in small-format commissions which allowed for a much closer and more complete viewpoint on the part of the devout viewer.

In her recent study Castaño maintained the plausible idea of a non-Spanish origin for the Master of the Triptych of Zarzoso, albeit with some clarifications regarding his possible origins and career in Castile. She reached the conclusion that the painter could have been of northern origin, “more Germanic and Burgundian”, and that he possibly began his artistic life in Spain in the context of Nicolás Francés, given that his style reveals some characteristic which suggest a connection. Around the mid-century he worked at the

³⁰ GUDIOL 1970.

³¹ CASTAÑO 2022, p. 119.

monastery of Guadalupe, very probably commissioned by the Zúñigas, although it is possible, he ended his career in Seville, given the evident connections between his painting and the art produced there.³² All this context is in perfect conformance with the characteristics of the present *Ecce Homo*, which should be considered a work executed by the artist around the mid-15th-century for an unknown client, perhaps a member of a noble Castilian family.

Dr Alberto Velasco Gonzàlez

Reial Acadèmia Catalana de Belles Arts de Sant Jordi

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Fig. 1. Master of the Zarzoso Triptych. *Ecce Homo* (reverse). Madrid, Galería Caylus



Fig. 2. Master of the Zarzoso Triptych. *Ecce Homo* (detail of the infra-red image). Madrid, Galería Caylus



Fig. 3. Master of the Zarzoso Triptych. *Triptych of the Convent of El Zarzoso*. Madrid, Museo del Prado.



Fig. 4. Master of the Zarzoso Triptych. *Triptych of the Convent of El Zarzoso* (detail). Madrid, Museo del Prado.



Fig. 5. Master of the Zarzoso Triptych. On the left, *Ecce Homo* (detail), Madrid, Galería Caylus. On the right, *The crucified Christ* (detail), monastery of Guadalupe, Guadalupe (Cáceres).



Fig. 6. *The Lamentation* (detail) Madrid, Museo del Prado.



Fig. 7. Master of the Zarzoso Triptych. *The Lamentation*, from the monastery of Guadalupe. Madrid, Museo del Prado.



Fig. 8. Master of the Triptych of El Zarzoso. *The Three Marys at the Tomb* and *The Nativity* from the monastery of Guadalupe. Private collection.

