

B R U
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MUSEA
BRUGGE



De Mena
Murillo
Zurbarán

SINT-JANSHOSPITAAL
MARIASTRAAT 38, BRUGGE
08.03 - 06.10.2019

Masters of the Spanish Baroque



Vlaanderen
verbeelding werkt

Musée national
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Luxembourg

MNHA

DE MENA, MURILLO EN ZURBARÁN MASTERS OF THE SPANISH BAROQUE

FROM 8 MARCH UNTIL 6 OCTOBER 2019 / EXHIBITION / SINT-JANSHOSPITAAL

Introduction

The Sint-Janshospitaal temporarily forms the decor for a selection of remarkable Spanish art from the 17th century. In the monumental hospital wards, some 20 works of religious sculpture and painting, full of Spanish passion, are on display. It is a rare opportunity to become acquainted with some lesser-known aspects of Spain's Golden Century. The highlight of the exhibition, in addition to paintings by famous Spanish masters like Murillo and Zurbarán, is a group of six hyper-realistic sculptures by the greatest sculptor of the Spanish Baroque, Pedro de Mena.

This project is in collaboration with the Luxemburg Musée National d'Histoire et d'Art.



SEEING IS BELIEVING

BY RUUD PRIEM, CONSERVATOR

Glass eyes and tears, ivory teeth, nails made from horn, red-coloured resin for blood: everything was permitted in the service of displaying religious emotion in the Spain of the 17th century. The statues created by Pedro de Mena and Gregorio Fernández stand in the tradition of intense and realistic images designed to move the souls of the faithful. They were often the product of many different hands, each with their own speciality.

Anyone who is interested in viewing hyper-realistic sculpture will eventually find their way to Spain. The exhibition 'The sacred made real. Spanish painting and culture, 1600-1700' in London and Washington (2010) recently focused attention on the remarkable quality of the statuary that was made there. Jusepe de Ribera, Francisco de Zurbarán and Diego Velázquez have already been resounding names in the world of art for many years, but sculptors like Juan Martínez Montañés, Pedro de Mena and Juan de Mesa have remained much less well-known. The exhibition made clear that in 17th century Spain the artistic merit of the country's sculptors was the equal of their painting compatriots, who are now much more famous.

In fact, a particularly noteworthy aspect of art in 17th century Spain was the intense collaboration and exchange of ideas between sculptors and painters. Both disciplines pushed each other forwards to achieve new heights of realism that could only have been dreamed of previously. This new 'mixed' form of art flourished primarily in four cities: Valladolid, Madrid, Granada and Seville.

In Valladolid it was Gregorio Fernández (ca. 1576-1636) who set the tone with a sober and refined realism that seems rooted in the tradition of North European sculpture. A statue crafted by Fernández is mentioned in a contemporary deed of donation, which underlines the level of appreciation that this kind of painted statue then enjoyed in Spain. The deed records a gift made by one Bernardo de Salcedo, a cleric attached to the Church of St. Nicholas in Valladolid. The gift was an 'Ecce Homo' by Gregorio Fernández, donated to the Brother-

hood of the Holy Sacrament in the city. It was gifted on condition that the statue would not leave the church to be carried in processions and that each year 15 masses would be said at the altar of the Ecce Homo, in presence of the artist himself.

Similar appreciation and admiration are also abundantly evident in the 1724 book 'Museo pictórico y escala óptica' by the Spanish art biographer Antonio Palomino, in which he describes a number of 17th century statues in glowing terms. Writing about a 'Christ carrying his cross' (ca. 1697) by Luisa Roldán, housed in the Convent of the Poor Clares in Sisante, Palomino comments: 'I was so overwhelmed when I saw this statue that it seemed almost disrespectful not to kneel down looking at it, because it appears to be so life-like, almost as if He was really standing there'.

Palomino's feelings on this occasion bring us to the heart of the matter: in 17th century Spain, art was an essential instrument for the spreading and confirming of the Catholic faith. Art was taken very seriously as a vehicle for religious instruction and devotion. The Counter Reformation and the Council of Trent (1545-1563) stimulated the emergence of new religious orders and lay brotherhoods that used the most subtle and convincing visual means to attract and keep the attention of the faithful. This found its expression in art that would truly touch people and inspire them to greater compassion. This was to be achieved by depicting stories from the Bible in a correct manner (in other words, in the manner approved by the Church), whilst at the same time also serving as an embellishment for the liturgy. These were the demands that were made of the religious art of the day and it led to the creation of the realistic painted sculptures that we now so closely associate with the Spain of the 17th century.

This art, which can still move us with its remarkable life-like realism, was actually part of a much older tradition. The 15th and 16th centuries saw a rich production of polychrome altar pieces and statues of saints, lavishly decorated in gold paint and other bright colours. Some of these statues also make an obvious appeal to our capacity for compassion. A

particularly fine example is to be found in the parish church at Neerbosch, near Nijmegen in The Netherlands. Whoever stands beneath this huge 15th century statue of the Crucified Christ, his pain-racked body hanging down from his nailed hands, his mouth open in anguish and his eyes cast down, cannot but help feeling for a moment the full weight of Christ's suffering. Late Middle Age statues of this kind from the Low Countries were certainly known to and absorbed by the Spanish tradition of sculpting. There were also Italian influences, especially in Granada and Seville, where the colourful Florentine sculptor Pietro Torrigiano (1472-1528) completed a number of important commissions at the start of the 16th century. Torrigiano's 'St. Jerome' (ca. 1525), probably made for the Monastery of San Jerónimo de Buenavista near Seville, still makes a powerful impression on the viewer, with its lived-in, leathery skin and the saint's intense look of concentration as he gazes at the crucifix in his hand.

4

Statues of saints were venerated and sometimes even worshipped in cathedrals, churches and abbeys. When they were paraded through the streets of the cities where they were kept, they were believed to exude something divine that invested those cities with a kind of supernatural power. Even today, many statues of Christ are still temporarily removed from their usual positions to be carried shoulder-high through the streets during the week before Easter - the 'Semana Santa' - by the monks and lay brothers of the 'confradias', the penitential brotherhoods. Such processions are a

remarkable sight: a company dressed in white robes and wearing sinister pointed hoods, later adopted by the Klu Klux Klan, surrounded by enthusiastic crowds responding with deep emotion to the appearance of 'their' saint - and this notwithstanding the fact that such images, according to the doctrine laid down by the Council of Trent, cannot be regarded, from a purely theological perspective, as being true saints. But in the fire of religious devotion the boundary between the living and the life-like often becomes blurred, and the statues were designed to do all they can to kindle that fire.

How did the sculptors achieve this effect? Marble was scarce in Spain and so they used wood. To begin with, a design drawing was made and a sculpture modelled, first in wax and then in wood. When the finished statue was intended for a permanent location, the weight of the construction was less important, allowing a solid block of wood to be used, slightly hollowed out at the back to prevent subsequent splitting. The head, arms and hands were often sculpted from separate pieces of wood, before being fixed into position with wooden pins or nails. In the second half of the 17th century, artists used all different kinds of materials and techniques to make their statues look as realistic as possible: glass eyes, ivory teeth, implantations with real hair for eye brows and eye lashes, tears made from droplets of glass, red-coloured resin to suggest blood, etc. For statues that were intended to be carried in procession, the weight of the construction was a matter of greater relevance. For this reason, these were usually made with a hollow structure and a



more basic finishing, with only the head, hands and possibly the arms and legs being given a more refined appearance. The hollow frame-work was covered in fine clothes made from rich fabric, which could blow in the wind, adding an extra touch of realism - and the more life-like the statue, the greater the impression it made. To achieve the right degree of facial expressiveness, use was often made of clay. Once again, it was usual to work with a number of different constituent elements, which were then assembled into a whole: clay was a heavy material and for large statues there was a risk that it would collapse or crack during the firing or drying process. Once the sculptor had finished his work, the statue was passed into the hands of the painter and gilder. The painter painted on the skin in a manner that either gave it a kind of glossy sheen (encaraciones de poli-miento) made up from several layers of paint or a more matt finish (encaraciones mates), which required the careful preparation of the wood and the use of less paint to create a more natural radiance. The gilders gave the sculpted clothing an impressive and distinguished look by smearing a layer of iron-rich clay mixed with an animal-based glue (known as bole) onto the wood, before applying a finishing layer of gold leaf. The leaf was then covered with a further layer of tempera, to give the glistening gold a duller appearance, into which a number of patterns could be drawn - the so-called estofado technique. As this description makes clear, this work involved many different pairs of hands, which in turn led to a very specific problem. The rigid guild system of the day meant

that, theoretically, the sculptors, painters and gilders were not allowed to do each other's work. In practice, however, their different contributions were regarded as complementary, and so painters and sculptors tended to work together in pairs (with the contractual fee for the commission being split between them). The sculptor was responsible for the three-dimensional composition and sometimes for the preparation of the wood surface; the painter used his skill to bring the sculpture to life.

Blood, sweat and tears were each a speciality in the great tradition of religious sculpture that flourished in Spain.

In Spain during the 17th and 18th century, this strict division of the creative process remained largely in force. However, in Andalusia the regulations were less strictly applied and there were several workshops which carried out both sculpting and painting assignments. The painter and sculptor Alonso Cano (1601-1667), who was also an architect, is good example. He worked in Granada and his versatility was an inspiration for a whole generation of new artists, who took the Spanish art market by storm with their realistic approach to their work. Cano's pupil, Pedro de Mena (1628-1688), is perhaps the best (and best known) of them. The skill with which he was able to suggest the stiff, ribbed fabric of St. Francis of Assisi's habit by applying subtle layers of paint to finely cut and sanded diagonal lines in the wood is truly



remarkable. Under the influence of his master, this hyper-realistic style became the trade mark of De Mena's art, first in Granada after 1652 and later, from 1658 onwards, at his new home base in Malaga. De Mena's sculptures are highly charged with emotion. We can see great concentration on the face of St. Francis, meditating on the crucifix he holds in his half-outstretched hand, with the other hand resting lightly on his breast. This same posture is also evident in De Mena's 'Mary Magdalen' in Valladolid: gracious and sunk deep in prayer, with loose hair and a rope tied around the middle of her only garment, a stiff, braided mat that is wound, tube-like, around her legs and torso. This stunningly life-like statue reveals its subject as a human being who wishes to educate the viewer and strengthen his devotion by posing in a most moving visual manner a key question: how can the viewing believer through great concentration become truly aware of the sacrifice of the suffering Christ? Perhaps by being confronted with the saint

in De Mena's penetrating and highly intrusive style? Yes, that's how!

Seeing is believing. This thought, expressed in wood, clay, paint and other materials, injected an unprecedented measure of life and vitality into the art of sculpture in 17th century Spain. And even for us more sober children of the cooler north, it is still difficult today not to be touched by the dramatic impression they create.

PUBLICATION

The exhibition catalogue in five languages is published by Uitgeverij Van de Wiele.

Languages: DUTCH/FR/GERM/ENG/SP

€ 19.95

80 pages

On sale in the museum shops at the Sint-Janshospitaal and the Arentshof, Dijver 16.

AFTERGLOW

Since recently, Musea Brugge has been keeping its doors open after the normal closing time on the third Thursday of each month, between the hours of 17.00 and 21.00. This extended opening is always at a different location and the programme of special activities includes guided tours, workshops and performances.

The evening opening on **18 April** will be at the Sint-Janshospitaal.

There will be guided visit to the exhibition at fixed times (in Dutch, English and French).

Practical info:

Visitors benefit from reduced rates, i.e. € 10 instead of € 12. Youth -18: free access.



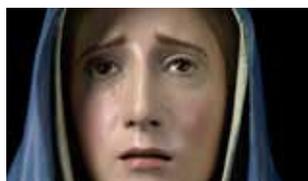
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1



2



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4



5



6



10



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7



9



11



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14



15



13

1. detail of : Pedro de Mena, Mater Dolorosa, c. 1680,
Polychrome wood with reverse painted glass eyes, 49 x 39 x 22 cm
MNHA, Luxemburg (on loan from a private collection), inv. 2016-D009/002 - © Dominique Provost
2. detail of : Pedro de Mena, Mater Dolorosa, c. 1680
Polychrome wood with reverse painted glass eyes, 49 x 39 x 22 cm
MNHA, Luxemburg (on loan from a private collection), inv. 2016-D009/002 - © Dominique Provost
3. Bartholomé Esteban Murillo, Mater Dolorosa
Oil on canvas, 66,4 x 51,5 cm
MNHA, Luxemburg (on loan from a private collection), inv. 2016-D011/002 - © Tom Lucas
4. Juan Bautista Maíno, Saint Jerome
Oil on canvas, 98 x 55,5 cm
Private collection - © Guillem Fernandez-Huerta
5. Pedro de Mena, Virgin of the Immaculate Conception, c. 1655
Parcel-gilt and polychrome wood, 83,5 x 41 x 25,5 cm
MNHA, Luxemburg (on loan from a private collection), inv. 2017-D008/001 - © Dominique Provost
6. detail of : Pedro de Mena, Virgin of the Immaculate Conception, c. 1655
Parcel-gilt and polychrome wood, 83,5 x 41 x 25,5 cm
MNHA, Luxemburg (on loan from a private collection), inv. 2017-D008/001 - © Dominique Provost
7. Pedro de Mena, Saint Frances of Assisi
Polychrome wood and glass, (with plinth) 86 x 38 x 32 cm
(MNHA exhibition 2017-D005/001) - © Dominique Provost
8. detail of : Pedro de Mena, Saint Frances of Assisi
Polychrome wood and glass, (with plinth) 86 x 38 x 32 cm
(MNHA exhibition 2017-D005/001) - © Dominique Provost
9. detail of : Pedro de Mena, Infant Saint John the Baptist, c. 1675
Polychrome wood and glass, (with plinth) 73 x 49 x 33,5 cm
MNHA, Luxemburg (on loan from a private collection), inv. 2016-D014/001 - © Dominique Provost
10. Pedro de Mena, Infant Saint John the Baptist, c. 1675
Polychrome wood and glass, (with plinth) 73 x 49 x 33,5 cm
MNHA, Luxemburg (on loan from a private collection), inv. 2016-D014/001 - © Dominique Provost
11. Francesco de Zurbarán, The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian
Oil on canvas, 199,7 x 105,5 cm
Private collection, Europe - © Tom Lucas
12. detail of : Pedro de Mena, Ecce Homo, c. 1680
Polychrome wood with reverse painted glass eyes, 49 x 41,5 x 18 cm
MNHA, Luxemburg (on loan from a private collection), inv. 2016-D009/001 - © Dominique Provost
13. detail of : Pedro de Mena, Ecce Homo, c. 1680
Polychrome wood with reverse painted glass eyes, 49 x 41,5 x 18 cm
MNHA, Luxemburg (on loan from a private collection), inv. 2016-D009/001 - © Dominique Provost
14. Francisco Collantes, The denial of Saint Peter
Oil on canvas, 142,6 x 101,4 cm
MNHA, Luxemburg (on loan from a private collection), inv. 2016-D006/001 - © Tom Lucas
15. Pedro de Mena, San Pedro de Alcántara
Polychrome wood with reverse painted glass eyes, 70 x 37 x 25 cm
MNHA, Luxemburg (on loan from a private collection), inv. 2018-D006/001 - © Dominique Provost

MORE INFO

All arrangements can be made via sarah.bauwens@brugge.be or on +32 50 44 87 08.

Press visits to the exhibition are possible with an appointment: see under the heading 'pers' (press) on the website www.museabrugge.be.

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PRACTICAL INFO EXHIBITION

Title	De Mena, Murillo and Zurbarán. Masters of the Spanish baroque
Location	Sint-Janshospitaal, Mariastraat 38, 8000 Bruges
Dates	from 8 March until 6 October, 2019
Opening Hours	from Tuesday to Sunday from 9.30 until 17 h.
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More info	www.museabrugge.be

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