

# *The Holy Family* by Jan Gossart



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**BILBOKO ARTE  
EDERREN MUSEOA  
MUSEO DE BELLAS  
ARTES DE BILBAO**

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**T**he *Holy Family* [fig. 1], a painting of exceptional quality now in the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum collection, is the work of Jan Gossart, also known as “Gossaert” and “Mabuse”<sup>1</sup>. The recent exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum in New York, subsequently shown at London’s National Gallery, *Man, Myth, and Sensual Pleasures: Jan Gossart’s Renaissance*, has prompted a reappraisal of the artist’s work, especially in regard to paintings that have not received due attention in the past. The Bilbao *Holy Family* is just such a work. Although known as early as the 17th century in the Convent of the Carmelites of Cuerva, Toledo, Spain, and exhibited in the 1965 monographic show on Gossart in Rotterdam and Bruges, there has been little discussion of the work in the scholarly literature since. The recent in-depth examination provided us with a unique opportunity to contribute to our stylistic, historical, technical and analytical understanding of the painting. This essay details the results of the study, which revealed a number of hitherto unknown features about the work.

## Style and technique

In the Bilbao painting Gossart has placed the Holy Family in a tightly-cropped palatial setting adorned with marble columns that are decorated with golden bucrania, swags, and acanthus leaves. References to classical antiquity continue in the view through the window at the upper right where ruins of an ancient palace can be seen. Sitting on a stone bench by an open window, the Virgin Mary offers a white rose—symbolic of her purity and the miracle of Christ’s birth—to her squirming son. On the other side of a parapet, separated from the Virgin and Christ, a contemplative Joseph leans with both hands on his walking stick. He is both physically and psychologically distant from his family, and he peers out as if to invite the viewer to

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<sup>1</sup> The name Mabuse derives from his home town of Maubeuge, then part of the mediaeval county of Hainaut in Flanders, today in northern France, after being given to the country in the Peace of Nijmegen in 1678. In the recent 2010 monograph by Maryan Ainsworth *et al.*, the spelling of the artist’s name is returned to the way it originally appeared in signed paintings, drawings, and documents of his own time, that is Gossart. The spelling with an added “e”—Gossaert—was introduced in the scholarly literature of the late 19th and 20th centuries. See Ainsworth/Alsteens/Orenstein 2010.



1. Jan Gossart (c. 1478-1532)  
*The Holy Family*, c. 1525-1530  
Oil on panel, 55.9 x 42 cm  
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum  
Inv. no. 69/110





2. Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528)  
*The Holy Family*, c. 1492-1493  
 Dark brown pen drawing, 29 x 21.4 cm  
 Kupferstichkabinett, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin  
 Inv. no. KdZ 4174



3. Filippino Lippi (1457-1504)  
*The Holy Family with Saint John the Baptist and Saint Margaret (Warren Tondo)*, c. 1495  
 Tempera and oil on panel, 153 cm (diameter)  
 Cleveland Museum of Art  
 Inv. no. 1932.227

contemplate with him the mystery of his paternity and his restricted role as Christ's earthly father<sup>2</sup>. This non-narrative treatment of the Holy Family had developed in the late fifteenth century as a response to an increasing devotion to Joseph as an exemplar of devotion and humility and as the earthly protector of the Virgin and Child. In 1479 Pope Sixtus IV introduced a feast day in honour of Joseph, and the *Historiae van den heiligen Josef (Story of Saint Joseph)*, published by the Brethren of the Common Life in 1490, further promoted the popularity of the saint<sup>3</sup>.

Although this close-up view of the Holy Family was a favourite subject of Antwerp artists at the time, in particular Joos van Cleve and his workshop, this is the only extant painting of it in Gossart's oeuvre<sup>4</sup>. In considering his own treatment of the theme, Gossart may well have looked to Albrecht Dürer, a frequent source of inspiration. Several of Dürer's early drawings deal with the isolation of an aged Joseph in representations of the Holy Family, as key examples of c. 1491 in Erlangen (Univertätsbibliothek) and ca. 1492-1493 in Berlin (Kupferstichkabinett, Staatliche Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz) show [fig. 2]<sup>5</sup>. In particular, as Joseph Leo Koerner has discussed, Dürer considered Joseph's "isolating psychic state of inward contemplation"<sup>6</sup> a condition that Gossart also chose to emphasize. Herzog drew attention to another possible source in Filippino Lippi's Joseph in the *Warren Tondo* (Cleveland Museum of Art) [fig. 3] and the similarities between the

2 Regarding Saint Joseph's role as observer, distanced from the Virgin and the Child, see Foster 1978, pp. 231-233, and the examples on p. 220.

3 Ibid, pp. 60-63. See also Butler 1956, vol. I, pp. 631-633; Filas 1967; Wilson 2001.

4 On Gossart's drawings of the Holy Family, see Ainsworth/Alsteens/Orenstein 2010, cats. 69, 70 and especially 71.

5 See Koerner 1993, pp. 11 and 15, figs. 4 and 6.

6 Ibid, p. 14.



4. Jan Gossart (c. 1478-1532)  
*Virgin and Child*, c. 1527  
Oil on oak panel, 63 x 50 cm  
Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid  
Inv. no. P01930

two bearded, wizened old men, who likewise lean with both hands on a walking stick<sup>7</sup>. Little attention has been paid to the cities that Gossart visited on his way to Rome in 1508-09 as part of Philip of Burgundy's diplomatic mission to visit Pope Julius II. As Marino Sanudo recorded in his diary, these stops included Florence, where Gossart could have seen Lippi's work<sup>8</sup>.

Angulo Iñiguez was the first to note the stylistic connection between the Bilbao *Holy Family* and the Prado *Virgin and Child* [fig. 4], relating the former to Gossart's late work<sup>9</sup>, an opinion that was reinforced by the 1965 Rotterdam/Bruges exhibition catalogue<sup>10</sup>. Indeed the types employed in each painting for the heads of the Virgin and Christ Child show strong similarities. In particular, the stark white flesh tones, giving the appearance of highly polished marble, is an aesthetic approach that Gossart more often adopted in his works of the late 1520s. To achieve this, Gossart densely worked in the flesh tones with lead white paint, as the x-radiograph of the Bilbao painting readily shows, especially in the head of the Virgin, which takes on a rather mask-like appearance [figs. 5 and 6]<sup>11</sup>. Although it has not been established in the Bilbao painting,

7 Herzog 1969, p. 333.

8 On the stops made by the mission to Rome, see Sanudo 1879-1903, vol. 7 (1882), especially cols. 684, 689, 694, 716, 746, 748, 756; vol. 8 (1882), cols. 14-15.

9 Angulo 1937, p. 194.

10 Rotterdam/Bruges 1965, pp. 165-168, cat. 26.

11 Maryan Ainsworth was the first to comment and shed light on this issue in Ainsworth/Alsteens/Orenstein 2010, p. 83, figs. 84 and 85; p. 5.



5-6. Jan Gossart (c. 1478-1532)  
*The Holy Family*  
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum  
Detail of the Virgin's face  
and the same detail under  
X-radiograph

in certain cases, Gossart even underpainted the flesh tones with a grey layer, which enhanced their pearly, opalescent surface appearance<sup>12</sup>.

An equally compelling comparison with the Bilbao Virgin is the same figure in the Berlin *Virgin and Child* [fig. 7], where individual features of the face are nearly identically drawn and arranged. There is a considerable difference, however, between the rather boneless, snake-like contortions of the body of the Christ Child in the Bilbao painting and his counterparts in the Madrid and Berlin paintings. In fact, the rather infelicitous drawing of the Child's right leg and the awkward juncture of the left arm to the shoulder have caused some—Herzog in particular—to consider the Bilbao painting as a workshop product<sup>13</sup>. However, for Gossart, expressing the writhing movement of the figure was far more important than presenting anatomical correctness, as is evidenced in numerous drawings and prints, including those of Adam and Eve<sup>14</sup>. In fact, in the *Virgin and Child* paintings of the 1520s, Gossart makes a point of exploiting the exaggerated movement of the Child in order to convey the life-like essence of the infant Saviour<sup>15</sup>.

Just how Gossart achieved the remarkable results of the Bilbao painting can be rediscovered thanks to the technical examinations of the materials and techniques performed in 2010<sup>16</sup>. As was the case with all of Gossart's paintings, the Bilbao panel is on oak wood, most likely from the Baltic region<sup>17</sup>. Remarkably, the panel has never been thinned or cradled, and retains its original 1.55 cm thickness<sup>18</sup>. Several of Gossart's

12 Ibid., p. 85; cat. 10, pp. 154-157.

13 Herzog 1969, p. 332.

14 See Ainsworth/Alsteens/Orenstein 2010, in particular cats. 64, 65, 69, 72, 82, 93, 109 and 112-113.

15 Ibid, cats. 13-21.

16 Pigment analyses included PLM, micro-chemical analysis, HPTLC, FTIR and SEM-EDX, and were performed by Andrés Sánchez Ledesma and María Jesús Gómez García, from Arte-Lab, S. L. All samples were taken from the margins of the painting. The x-radiograph and infrared reflectography was carried out at the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum. To date we have been unable to perform dendrochronology. Apart from the restoration work carried out at the Prado in 1937, restorer Gonzalo Perales Soriano cleaned the painting in 1968. The painting was given conservation treatment in 1978 at the Department of Conservation & Restoration at the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum, where it was restored in 2010.

17 On the type of wood and the dendrochronology of Gossart's panels, see Peter Klein's report in Ainsworth/Alsteens/Orenstein 2010, pp. 429-433.

18 Several other panels by Gossart conserve their original thickness, similar to the thickness of the work in Bilbao. The *Portrait of a Man* from Antwerp is 1.9 cm thick and the thickness of the *Adam and Eve* in the Royal Collection varies between 1.9 and 2.5 cm.



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7. Jan Gossart (c. 1478-1532)  
*Virgin and Child*, c. 1525-1530  
Oil on panel, 47.7 x 38.2 cm  
Gemäldegalerie,  
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin  
Inv. no. 650

panels including the Royal Collection *Adam and Eve*, the Berlin *Adam and Eve*,<sup>19</sup> and the Bilbao *Holy Family*, show the original marks of the panel distributors on their versos, in more or less straight grooves [fig. 8], but comparison of these marks does not confirm one common source.

The Bilbao painting is made of two planks of wood with the wood grain running vertically, and the joint fits so neatly that it is hard to spot even under x-radiography. The planks are joined by two dowels, one located in the upper portion of the Virgin's head, and the other in the lower part of the back and buttocks of the Christ Child at the Virgin's right hand. The lower dowel is closer to the bottom edge of the painting than the upper one is to the top edge, suggesting that the panel may have been cut to some extent on the bottom edge<sup>20</sup>. Tension built up in the right panel and caused it to split vertically; a crack runs through the head of Joseph and the left knee of the Virgin [figs. 9 and 24].

<sup>19</sup> On the distributor's mark of the wood for the Berlin *Adam and Eve*, see Ainsworth/Alsteens/Orenstein 2010, p. 69, fig. 65.

<sup>20</sup> The dowels are approximately 6.5 cm and the orifices that hold them measure 7.7 cm x 0.8 cm; the upper one is located 12.6 cm from this edge, over the head of the Virgin, and the lower one at 10.5 cm from the edge, on the Child's hip.





8. Jan Gossart (c. 1478-1532)  
*The Holy Family*  
 Bilbao Fine Arts Museum  
 Reverse of support with carpenters' marks



9. Jan Gossart (c. 1478-1532)  
*The Holy Family*  
 Bilbao Fine Arts Museum  
 X-radiograph



10. Reflectografía infrarroja  
 Jan Gossart (c. 1478-1532)  
*The Holy Family*  
 Bilbao Fine Arts Museum  
 Infrared reflectography

While clearly showing the grain of the wood, the x-radiograph does not reveal any changes made during the actual painting process. As was to be expected, and in line with Flemish technique, Gossart left reserve areas for some features of the composition, including the figures, the flower, and the ruins in the background. The x-radiograph reveals in particular the yellowish highlights of the bronze touches adorning the columns, the sky, the most luminous points on the Virgin's robe, and her and the Child's flesh tones. The lower moulding of the plinth on which the column rests was painted in light grey in a continuous line, with darker brush strokes added afterwards to provide the definition of the dental border. Marginal losses, dark-toned in the x-radiograph, show how well preserved the painting is, with the exception of one 17-cm-long loss on the figure of Saint Joseph; a powerful impact may have caused the fine crackling around the edges.

The *Holy Family* was apparently made out of its frame and, although not thinned, the edges of the panel have been trimmed. The paint completely covers the surface of the panel. Recent findings indicate that Gossart had no consistent procedure for joining the panel to its frame—sometimes this occurred as an initial step, and sometimes the frame was added after the completion of the painting<sup>21</sup>. This represents a transitional phase in early 16th-century practice that was moving toward the point where more frames and paintings were executed separately.

Based on a limited number of paint samples and stratigraphies taken from the Bilbao *Holy Family*, certain conclusions may be drawn. The samples were taken from the Virgin's red dress, Joseph's red robe, his blue hood and the sky. As expected, all of the samples showed a calcium carbonate ground. A quite thick lead-white priming was applied over the ground. Whether the underdrawing [fig. 10] was done beneath or onto this priming (as has been found in other Gossart paintings)<sup>22</sup> could not be determined, as none of the samples showed an underdrawing layer. In the red draperies, an opaque red layer containing vermilion, lead white, calcium carbonate, and iron earth was superimposed with a glaze of red lake containing cochineal [fig. 11]. The blues of Joseph's hood and the sky were made with azurite and lead white [fig. 12]. The findings, then, proved to be completely standard for painting practice of the time.

In Gossart's paintings of the 1520s, he developed a more schematic, short-hand style of underdrawing emphasizing bold contours made with the brush, with very broad parallel and cross-hatching to further model the forms. As time progressed he began to make increasing use of cartoons to transfer the main features of his composition. In the underdrawing this is evident from the rather rigid contours of forms and the relative paucity of hatching. The minimal underdrawing found in the Bilbao *Holy Family* [fig. 10], is mostly restricted to the contours of the figures, and there are ruled lines introduced to indicate a preliminary design for architectural features. This is very much in line with Gossart's standard practice in works of the latter part of the 1520s, although underdrawing has not been revealed in all of his works from this period<sup>23</sup>.

As Nadine Orenstein noted in her study of the *Hercules and Deianira* of c. 1530, a woodcut after a design by Gossart, "the couple occupies a shallow space that looks like a room in an ancient Roman architectural salvage warehouse, delineated by large sections of classical columns and pedestals<sup>24</sup>." This could as well describe the setting for the Bilbao *Holy Family* and calls to mind other late works, such as the Boston *Mary Magdalen* [fig. 13] or the Norfolk *Virgin and Child* [fig. 14] that likewise are part of a composition where

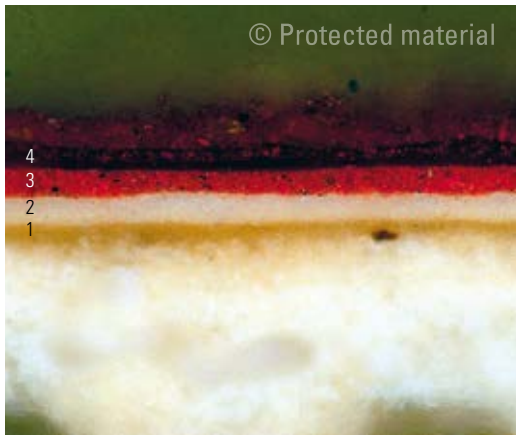
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21 Maryan Ainsworth cites two other cases in Ainsworth/Alsteens/Orenstein 2010, pp. 70-71.

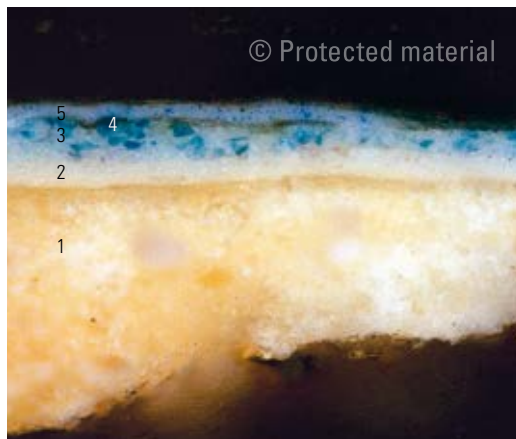
22 Ibid, p. 71.

23 See other comments by Maryan Ainsworth in Ainsworth/Alsteens/Orenstein 2010, pp. 74-78.

24 Ibid, p. 422, cat. 118.



11. Jan Gossart (c. 1478-1532)  
*The Holy Family*  
 Bilbao Fine Arts Museum  
 Stratigraphy of a sample taken from Saint Joseph's red cloak (280 X)  
 1. White calcium carbonate ground (> 160)  
 2. Lead-white priming (25-30 µm)  
 3. Red containing lead-white, calcium carbonate and earths (25-30 µm)  
 4. Reddish brown glaze containing organic red lake and cochineal, lead-white and calcium carbonate (35-40 µm)



12. Jan Gossart (c. 1478-1532)  
*The Holy Family*  
 Bilbao Fine Arts Museum  
 Stratigraphy of a sample taken from the blue sky (280 X)  
 1. White calcium carbonate ground (145 µm)  
 2. Lead-white priming (25-30 µm)  
 3. Lead-white and azurite blue (25-30 µm)  
 4. Brown  
 5. Repaint containing zinc white and synthetic ultramarine blue (0-20 µm)

the definition of the space is achieved by sharp contrasts of light and dark on architecture<sup>25</sup>. Enhancing the sense of space and form is Gossart's remarkable skill at the illusionistic description of various textures. In the Bilbao painting, he achieves stunning effects of sparkling light on the gilded or bronze decorations [fig. 15] on the columns behind the figures and creates a sense of depth through the sensitive modulation of light on the receding walls of the chamber. Gossart's incised or painted vertical stroke down the centre of each column serves to establish the highlight on the rounded volume, while light on the contours of the column further suggests its three-dimensional form. Deft brushwork shows Gossart's mastery of execution of a wide range of objects, whether they are opalescent pearls, gossamer veils, heavy woollen mantles, or the delicate petals of a rose.

Gossart's innovative approach to theme and composition, and his extraordinary mastery of execution made his work famous in its own time. It is therefore not surprising that imitations of the Bilbao *Holy Family* were produced in the next generation of painters, particularly in the workshop of Pieter Coecke van Aelst in Antwerp<sup>26</sup>. Here the variations on Gossart's work found a new audience in eager buyers on the open art market.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, cats. 38 and 55 a-c.

<sup>26</sup> Marlier 1966, pp. 237-240, figs. 176, 177, 179, 180.



13. Jan Gossart (c. 1478-1532)  
*Mary Magdalen*, c. 1525-1530  
 Oil on panel, 49.5 x 39.4 cm  
 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston  
 Inv. no. 1991.585



14. Jan Gossart (c. 1478-1532)  
*Virgin with Child* (central panel of the *Norfolk Triptych*), c. 1525-1530  
 Oil on panel, 47.6 x 36.8 cm  
 Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, Virginia  
 Donated by Walter P. Chrysler  
 Inv. no. 71.491



15. Jan Gossart (c. 1478-1532)  
*The Holy Family*  
 Bilbao Fine Arts Museum  
 Detail



## The story of the painting

Part of this essay focuses on reconstructing the story of Gossart's *The Holy Family*, discovering who owned it and following the work's trail, as far as possible, before its arrival at the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum. One of the basic tasks involved sifting through old manuscript documents—for the most part wills—now kept in a range of historical archives, for any mention of the work that would enable us to relate it to its previous owners. Although some of this investigative work was quite discouraging, several discoveries provided documentary proof for what had been, until now, mere conjectures. The essay also deals with the problems affecting the work during the Spanish Civil War, thanks to a number of revealing documents from the time<sup>27</sup> that brought to light new information. Finally, it plots the work's path towards its acquisition by the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum.

Although the precise date the painting arrived in Spain from Flanders remains a mystery, its centuries-long sojourn in the same place, the town of Cuerva, 28 kilometres from Toledo, was obviously the first clue to follow up in tracing its former owners, particularly as all the evidence pointed to the illustrious and powerful Lasso de la Vega family, lords of the *villa*, or borough<sup>28</sup>. To place the work in its Toledo context one needs to follow the tracks that some members of the family left in Cuerva, including the construction of the parish church of Santiago Apóstol (Saint James the Apostle), the *villa's* most outstanding religious monument<sup>29</sup>, the founding of the convent of the Discalced Carmelites and, finally, the building of the Chapel of the Relics inside the church, all of them associated with the family and closely related to the painting under examination here.

Construction work on the church of Santiago [fig. 16], burial place of the Lasso de la Vega family for more than two centuries, began in the early 16th century, on the initiative of Sancha de Guzmán (?-1537) and her husband Garcilaso de la Vega (?-1512), who had bought the *villa* of Cuerva between 1493, the year of their marriage, and 1499<sup>30</sup>. In 1548, their grandson, Garcilaso de la Vega y Guzmán (Toledo, c. 1498-1564), lord of los Arcos, Batres and Cuerva, married Aldonza Niño de Guevara (Toledo, c. 1533-Cuerva, Toledo, 1603), sister to Cardinal and Inquisitor General Fernando Niño de Guevara, portrayed by El Greco in around 1600. Aldonza financed the major works to enlarge and refit the church between 1565 and 1572. Some years later, on 11 July 1585, Aldonza also founded on a provisional basis a convent of Discalced Carmelites in one of the houses they owned, until the definitive construction was concluded in 1614 [fig. 17]. Aldonza retired there to a life of seclusion until her death in 1603, and although she wore the Carmelite habit, never actually took orders<sup>31</sup>.

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27 Our grateful thanks to Mikel Urizar, Head of the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum Archive, for his vital role in obtaining these documents.

28 In the handwritten documents of the time we consulted, the surname Lasso is spelt indiscriminately with one s or two. Here we use the double s spelling, which in our experience is the most frequent version.

29 See Ríos de Balmaseda 1998. We are most grateful to Ms. Ríos de Balmaseda for all the information she generously made available to us. See also Marías 1983-1986, vol. 4 (1986), pp. 162-166. The church was declared a national historic and artistic monument on 10 July 1975. See the official web page of the town council of Cuerva: <http://www.cuerva.org/parroquia.htm> (consulted: 28/12/2009). Our thanks also to Lucía Castro for the photographs of the church at Cuerva.

30 Sancha de Guzmán was the heiress of the domain of Batres and Garcilaso de la Vega was the Knight Commander of León and the ambassador of the Catholic Kings in Rome from 1494 to 1499. The couple obtained the royal faculty to add the borough of Cuerva to the entailed estate of Batres in 1504. Years later Garcilaso inherited the entailed estate of Arcos. On his death, his first-born son, Pedro Lasso de la Vega, known as el Comunero, inherited the entailed estate of the three boroughs: Arcos, Batres and Cuerva; his second son was the poet Garcilaso de la Vega (Toledo, c. 1499-Nice, 1536). See Vaquero/Ríos de Balmaseda 2001, pp. 18-20 and 24.

31 Aldonza is mentioned as a member of the community of Discalced Carmelites in *Cartas de Santa Teresa de Jesús, madre y fundadora de la reforma de la orden de Nuestra Señora del Carmen, de la primitiva observancia*. Madrid: Impr. del Mercurio (por Joseph de Orga impresor), 1752, vol. I, letter XXIV, p. 194: "17 In Cuerva the Mother Aldonza de la Madre de Dios known in the world as Doña Aldonza Niño de Guevara Mother of Rodrigo Lasso Niño de Guevara Count of Añover of great fame in Spain at the Court of the lord King Philip II and in Flanders at the Court of the Archduke Alberto, whom he served as Minister and High Counsellor And there too Rvd. Mother Leonor Maria del Santísimo Sacramento granddaughter of Brianda and daughter of the Count and Countess of Arcos".



16-17. Main façade of the church of St. James the Apostle; alley and entrance to the convent of the Discalced Carmelites and northern façade of the church of St. James the Apostle, Cuerva, Toledo

Two sons from this marriage, Pedro Lasso de la Vega Niño y Guzmán (Toledo, 1559-1637), I count of Arcos, and Rodrigo Niño Lasso de la Vega (Toledo, 1561-Mariemont, Belgium, 1620), II count of Añover, made major contributions to the extension and enhancement of the church of Santiago. Rodrigo went to Flanders in 1602, where he was in the service of the Archduke Albert of Austria and Isabel Clara Eugenia, as noted in his will: "*Don Rodrigo Niño Lasso de la Vega Caballero de la Orden de Santiago Comendador de Montiel y La Ossa, Sumillier de Corps del ssmo. Archiduque Alberto su Camarero mayor y Caballerizo mayor de sus Altezas*"<sup>32</sup>. And there he stayed until his death on 5 October 1620 at the royal country house of Mariemont, in the Earldom of Hainaut, in southern Belgium<sup>33</sup>. With Rodrigo in Flanders for nearly two decades, it is reasonable to think that, of all the members of the family, he was the one most likely to have sent Gossart's painting to Spain, and specifically to Cuerva, a suggestion made by Diego Angulo when he studied the painting in 1937<sup>34</sup>.

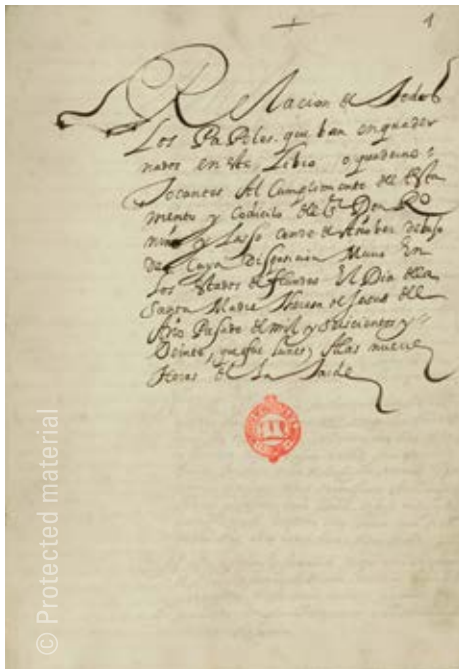
In the attempt to confirm this hypothesis, the first task involved reading Rodrigo Niño's ample and exhaustive last will [fig. 18], written in the year of his death, 1620, and checking to see whether it mentioned the painting. We did not however come up with a positive result. From the testament, it is clear that the count of Añover's real interest lay more than anything else in the collection of relics he had worked hard to gather and safeguard from the iconoclastic destruction rampant in Flanders from 1566, something that was still in vogue while he was there. His interest in relics is clear not just from the many such items in the will, but also from the fact that, with his brother Pedro, he ordered the construction of a place worthy to house them; this was the chapel of Relics, built between 1616 and 1620 inside the church of Santiago at Cuerva<sup>35</sup>. The chapel

32 *Colección de documentos referentes a D. Rodrigo Niño y Lasso Conde de Añover, fallecido en 1620, estando precedido de una relación de documentos que se contienen en este libro, 1620*. Madrid, Archive of the Instituto de Valencia de Don Juan, mss. 26-1-11, fol. 28v. My thanks are due to Cristina Partearroyo and M.ª Ángeles Santos Quer, curator and librarian respectively at the Instituto, for all the help given when consulting these documents.

33 The date of his death can be read in the manuscript mentioned in the previous note (fol. 29v).

34 "La Sagrada Familia del convento de Cuerva, por Gossaert" in Angulo 1937, 2nd epigraph, pp. 194-197, lam. III.

35 Ríos de Balmaseda 1991. By the same author, see Ríos de Balmaseda 1998, pp. 33-40. See also Esteban 2005, pp. 27 and 28. The chapel of Relics follows Juan Bautista Monegro's design. The church was completed in 1635 with the construction of the four-sectioned tower, the work being supervised by master builders Pedro de Lizardárate and Jorge Manuel Theotocópuli, son of El Greco. See website: <http://www.cuerva.org/parroquia.htm> (consulted: 28/12/2009).



18. Will of Rodrigo Niño y Lasso, count of Añover, 1620, fol. 1  
 Archive of the Instituto de Valencia de Don Juan, Madrid

of Relics is a large vaulted square to the right of the presbytery, capacious enough for the remains of saints for which Rodrigo, educated in the strictest context of Catholic spirituality and Counter-Reformation ideas, showed genuine veneration. In the extant manuscript on the foundation of the chapel of Relics, dating from 1615, Rodrigo stated both where he wanted to be buried<sup>36</sup> and the purpose of the chapel: “[...] and we have ordered that a chapel be made on the Epistle side of the high altar of the said high chapel, where to put and place many relics that I have acquired from diverse parts outside of those Kingdoms at great cost and effort and have had them adorned in the best, most decent fashion and most richly that I may [...]”<sup>37</sup>.

It should be noted that the manuscript does not contain a list of the objects the chapel would house in the future, among other reasons because it would only be finished five years later, but Rodrigo does mention that he would send a huge variety of relics until his death<sup>38</sup>. He also stipulated in his will that, after his death, the relics he still owned in Flanders, many of them contained in sumptuous reliquaries of gold and silver and adorned with precious stones, should be taken to Spain<sup>39</sup>. But to accompany all these relics Rodrigo also wanted the chapel itself to be richly adorned with objects of value, including of course paintings, as he states in the deed of foundation of the chapel: “[...] the relics, silver, gilded bronze, paintings and ornaments of my chapel [...]”<sup>40</sup>. This is why it would not be surprising to find Gossart’s panel amongst the paintings

36 “I declare that I and Pedro Laso de la Vega Niño, and Guzmán my brother Count of Arcos Steward to Prince Philip the fourth, our Lord, by agreement and conformity have decided to adorn our burial places in the Great Chapel of the parish church of Santiago in the Borough of Cuerba, where our parents and forebears are buried [...]”. *Fundación y Dotación de la capilla de las Santas reliquias de la Villa de Cuerva (Toledo)*, 1615. Madrid, Archive of the Instituto de Valencia de Don Juan, sign. 26-I-9, fol. 2r.

37 Ibid.

38 “[...] many heads, and many and varied types of bones of different Saints with their testimonials, and also of the other relics that from today forward I shall send as long as I live, to place in said chapel, for them to remain there in perpetuity [...]”. Ibid, fol. 22v.

39 “Also taken shall be all the relics that I bring with me kept in small lockets and reliquaries taking great care not to lose any nor touch any of what they have inside, this I command with all care”. *Colección de documentos referentes a D. Rodrigo Niño y Lasso Conde de Añover, fallecido en 1620, estando precedido de una relación de documentos que se contienen en este libro*, 1620. Madrid, Archive of the Instituto de Valencia de Don Juan, mss. 26-I-11, fol. 327r.

40 *Fundación y Dotación de la capilla de las Santas reliquias de la Villa de Cuerva (Toledo)*, 1615. Madrid, Archive of the Instituto de Valencia de Don Juan, sign. 26-I-9, fol. 22v.



19. Rodrigo de Villandrando (1588-1622)  
*Portrait of Mariana de Mendoza, countess of Los Arcos, before 1619*  
 Oil on canvas, 70 x 53 cm  
 Chapel of the Relics at the church of St. James the Apostle, Cuerva, Toledo

decorating the walls of the chapel, as it could well have been included in one of his regular dispatches from Flanders. As recorded in his will, Rodrigo wanted his sister-in-law, Mariana, and her daughter and his niece Leonor to receive on his death, besides some of the relics in his possession, other objects he greatly appreciated, like his portable oratory, sent to his sister-in-law<sup>41</sup>. However, it remains uncertain whether he sent the painting as a gift to Mariana while he was still in Flanders.

Sadly, after all the vicissitudes that have affected it over the centuries, the chapel of Relics stands virtually empty of everything that once contributed to its early splendour. Still on view today above the chapel's high altar is a large painting portraying the Last Supper, which Rodrigo Niño commissioned from Luis Tristán, the payment for which is detailed in the will<sup>42</sup>, a few small paintings and the portraits of his sister-in-law Mariana de Mendoza [fig. 19], of her son and heir Luis Lasso de la Vega (Toledo, 1597-1639) and of his wife María Magdalena Pacheco<sup>43</sup>.

In view of the fruitless search for this panel in Rodrigo Niño's documents<sup>44</sup>, attention shifted to the wills of his brother Pedro Lasso de la Vega, who inherited his goods when Rodrigo died without issue, of his wife Mariana de Mendoza and, finally, of their son and heir, Luis Lasso de la Vega. In chronological order, the first

41 "To my lady wife, the Countess of Arcos, I leave and she will be sent the bureau I use as oratory, with all the images and relics inside that the relics being so large and knowing the veneration in which she will keep them I beg she receive this and commend me to God". *Colección de documentos referentes a D. Rodrigo Niño y Lasso Conde de Añover, fallecido en 1620, estando precedido de una relación de documentos que se contienen en este libro*, 1620. Madrid, Archive of the Instituto de Valencia de Don Juan, mss. 26-l-11, fol. 208r. It is recorded that Mariana received the portable ebony oratory on 17 August 1622. Ibid, fol. 237r. To his niece Leonor, who had taken the veil as a Carmelite, he left: "To Leonor my niece in the belief that she will have fulfilled her desire to be a nun I leave her nothing of this world but I wish the relics I have and have always had by me be taken to her, amongst them is a Herat of gold inside which is a piece of heart of the Holy Mother Teresa of Jesus". Ibid, fols. 208r and 208v.

42 "I pay Luis Tristán painter of the Supper". Ibid, fols. 263r. On this painting, see Ríos de Balmaseda 1991.

43 See Ríos de Balmaseda 1998, p. 33.

44 Despite there being no mention of our panel in Rodrigo Niño Lasso's will, other paintings are included, like *The prayer in the garden* and "The panel of Our Lady of the Salutation, [which] was placed by order of the Count my husband and other executors in the Transparency of the chapel of Cuerva where are the sepulchre and bones of the Count of Añover". Ibid, fol. 256v. It also describes how 21 florins were paid to "a barber who cleaned the bones of the dead body of the count". His cleaned bones were taken to Spain in a "baulejo" or trunk and delivered to his brother Pedro, count of los Arcos, who received his bones in 1622. Ibid, fols. 315r and 315v.





20. Jan Gossart (c. 1478-1532)  
*The Holy Family*  
 Bilbao Fine Arts Museum  
 Detail

to be read was Mariana de Mendoza's will<sup>45</sup>, dated 12 December 1626. Mariana died on 7 January 1627, barely two months after making her will. And at last, in what Mariana declared in her will, we found the first reference to Gossart's painting:

I leave to Luis Laso my son Count of Añover the portable oratory that was left to me by the former Count of Añover [Rodrigo Niño] and the prayer in the Guerto [sic] [i.e. garden] the large one my lady mother left me and the image of the rose, all three things being what I most esteem and I pray my son that he does so and that he keeps them in his House and Estate in which I wish they should remain<sup>46</sup>.

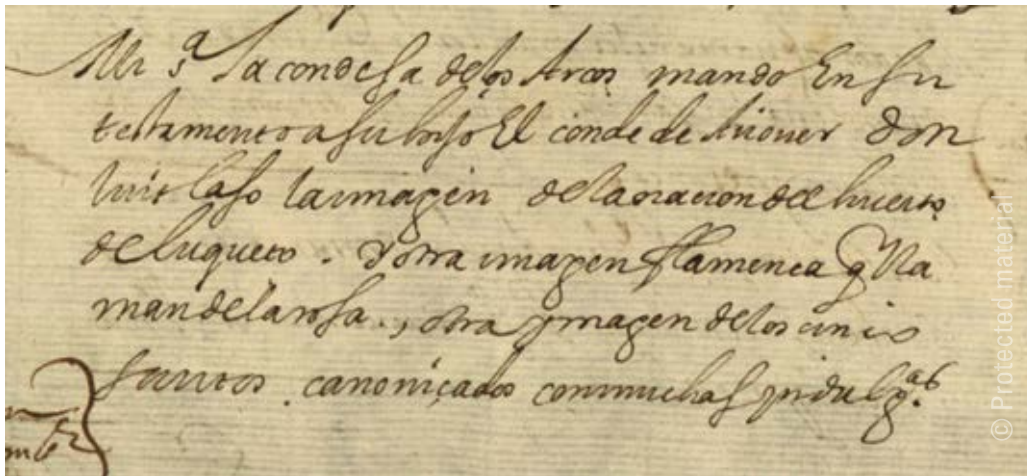
Without actually mentioning the artist by name, she refers here to the painting as "the image of the rose", which is how *The Holy Family* must have been known in Lasso de la Vega family circles. Later references all associate it with the rose, the flower the Virgin offers the Christ Child in the painting [fig. 20]. Mariana expresses her high appreciation of the work, one of the three things she most esteems; this is the basic reason for her urging her son Luis to hold on to all three and keep them bound to the house and estate so they should "not leave it". The fact that the painting was associated with the entailed estate, which the first-born inherited, is revealing, as it implied that they could not get rid of it, as the lands and the objects belonging to the estate were by nature perpetual assets<sup>47</sup>. While Mariana de Mendoza refers in her will to how two of the things she most esteems came to her, the portable oratory, left to her by her brother-in-law Rodrigo Niño, and the "oration in the Garden", inherited from her "*señora madre*", unfortunately she doesn't tell us how the third piece, "the image of the rose", came into her possession<sup>48</sup>.

45 Mariana de Mendoza, countess of los Arcos, was daughter of Leonor de Mendoza and Juan Hurtado de Mendoza y Guzmán, third count of Orgaz, lord of Santa Olalla, lord of Mendivil, Nanclares, Vergueda and la Ribera, prestamero mayor of Biscay, asistente for Seville, Grand Master, Steward to Prince (later King) Philip II. See <http://www.grandesp.org.uk/historia/gzas/arcoscde.htm> (consulted: 10/02/2011).

46 *Carta de testamento y última voluntad de doña Mariana de Mendoza condesa de los Arcos mujer de don Pedro Laso de la Vega Niño Guzmán, conde de los Arcos*, 1626. Madrid, AHPM, Archivo Histórico de Protocolos, protocol no. 2345, fol. 64v. My thanks are due to Maite Rodríguez Torres for her help in consulting this and other documents.

47 *Mayorazgos* (entailed estates) were not definitively suppressed until 30 August 1836.

48 No information came to light from the document concerning Mariana's father, Juan de Mendoza y Guzmán, third count of Orgaz, *Carta de Arras otorgada por Don Juan de Mendoza y Guzmán, conde de Orgaz, a Leonor de Figueroa Guzmán*, 1614. Madrid, AHPM, Archivo Histórico de Protocolos, protocol 3482.



21. Inventory, appraisal and sale of the family assets of the first Count of Los Arcos, 1632-1639, fols. 9v and 10r  
Archive of the Instituto de Valencia de Don Juan, Madrid

A new reference to the painting was also found in the document of Pedro Lasso de la Vega, Rodrigo's brother, entitled *Inventario, tasación y venta de los bienes familiares del primer Conde de los Arcos* (Inventory, appraisal and sale of the family assets of the first Count of Los Arcos), dated between 1632 and 1639 [fig. 21]. Here, the mention of Gossart's painting is more explicit, which helps us to identify it with increased confidence, as it indicates that the work is "a Flemish image":

My *señora* Countess of Los Arcos [Mariana de Mendoza] left in her will to her son the Count of Añover don Luis Lasso the image of the oration in the garden by the Luqueto. And another Flemish painting they refer to as the image of the rose, another image of those five saints canonized with many indulgences that Cardinal Barberino presented as a legacy *a latere* of Pope Urban VIII. And the Portable Oratory of the Count of Añover, Don Rodrigo with a reliquary and paintings within: the *señora* ordered that these four pieces after the days of her son the Count of Añover don Luis should remain bound to her house and estate and her successors in it<sup>49</sup>.

Pedro Lasso's insistence in the last part of this paragraph on the binding to the estate of these four works—adding here "the image of the five saints canonized" to the three others—speaks volumes of the high esteem in which they were held. Later documents from other members of the family add further emphasis on this point and on the prohibition on selling entailed assets<sup>50</sup>. This is one of the reasons why Gossart's painting remained in the Lasso de la Vega family for centuries and avoided the auctions organized by the family.

On the death in 1632 of Luis, son and heir of Mariana de Mendoza and Pedro Lasso de la Vega, his father, who still had five years to live, took charge of the inventory of his goods and assets, which included:

La oración del Guerto. Copia de Luqueto en doscientos cincuenta reales /  
La copia de Nuestra Señora de la Rosa en quarenta ducados  
(The Prayer in the Garden. Copy of Luqueto at two hundred and fifty reales /  
The copy of Our Lady of the Rose at forty ducats)<sup>51</sup>.

49 The author of *Prayer in the Garden*, Luqueto, Luca Cambiasso is mentioned here, but not the author of "image of the rose", whose identity they were probably unaware of. *Inventario, tasación y venta de los bienes familiares del primer Conde de los Arcos*, 1632-1639. Madrid, Archive of the Instituto de Valencia de Don Juan, mss. 26-V-24, fols. 9v and 10r.

50 This is true of the *Inventario de Bienes de Pedro Lasso de la Vega y Figueroa, conde de los Arcos*, before the clerk Diego Sánchez, 9 December 1699. Madrid, AHPM, Archivo Histórico de Protocolos, vol. 12598, fols. 74r, 74v and 78r. He was "Señor de las Villas de Batres y Cuerva, Gentilhombre de Cámara del Rey Nuestro Señor don Carlos Segundo", son of Luis Lasso de la Vega and María Pacheco, and therefore grandson of Pedro Lasso de la Vega and Mariana de Mendoza. In it he orders his son Joaquín, and "all those that come after him", not to alter the clauses of the principal entailed estate, as all those he possessed had "las mismas clausulas y prohibición de enajenación", i.e. the same clauses and prohibition against alienation.

51 *Inventario, tasación y almoneda de los bienes de Luis Lasso de la Vega realizado por su padre Pedro Lasso de la Vega Niño Guzmán a su muerte en 1632*, 1632. Madrid, AHPM, Archivo Histórico de Protocolos, protocol 6167, fol. 391.

It is striking that, unlike the other paintings listed in this manuscript, both works are described as “copies”. One plausible explanation would be that the originals of the works were in the church in Cuerva or in the Chapel of Relics and that the family, which greatly appreciated them, had commissioned copies to be able to enjoy them at their mansion house in Cuerva or one of their other houses; this would also explain the accompanying financial appraisals, which would make little sense if the paintings in question were the originals bound to the entailed estate. The fact that one of them is listed in another document as: “*Lo primero un quadro de la oración del huerto copia de la de Luqueto con su marco en doscientos cincuenta Reales*”<sup>52</sup> (The first a painting of the Prayer in the Garden copy of the one by Luqueto with its frame at two hundred and fifty reales) would seem to confirm them as copies.

As we have seen thus far from the references found to Gossart’s *The Holy Family*, all dating from the 17th century, the documentary evidence points compellingly to the Lasso de la Vega family as the owners.

Nothing more is heard of the painting until, in the early 20th century, Jerónimo Pérez de Ayala y Álvarez de Toledo, count of Cedillo (1862-1924)<sup>53</sup>, visited the church and the convent at Cuerva. The Ministry of Public Instruction had commissioned him to produce the *Catálogo Monumental de la Provincia de Toledo* [Catalogue of Monuments of the Province of Toledo] to examine and publicize the artistic heritage in the province. He drove to towns and villages in a carriage, taking notes and pouring over the archives he found. However, the catalogue, the result of his thorough, painstaking study, was not published until 1959, half a century after it was written and thirty-five years after his death. In the pages devoted to Cuerva<sup>54</sup>, a place of interest because of its general historical and architectural heritage, after a description of the parish church of Santiago, he mentions the chapels added subsequently, including the large chapel of the Relics, about which he says:

[...] the pious gentleman Rodrigo Niño y Lasso, Count of Añover, second son of Aldonza, built at his expense the spacious chapel of the Relics, to provide a worthy resting-place for many which, in danger of being profaned by heretics, he collected from several abbeys in Holland and Zeeland, sending them to Cuerva, where they are now kept<sup>55</sup>.

Several lines later he mentions just two objects linked with the chapel of the Relics. One is the reproduction of the great high retable in El Escorial monastery<sup>56</sup> and of the other, very much to the point here, he gives the following description:

In the convent of the Discalced Carmelites (who hold it in deposit): 108 The Virgin, Saint Joseph and the Child. Oil on panel. The Virgin holds the divine Infant with her right hand and with the left shows Him a flower. Saint Joseph contemplates the scene. The drawing is correct, the modelling smooth and the details and accessories are particularly fine. The architectural decor is Italian Renaissance. Height, 0.56 m. Width, 0.42 m. Spanish or Italianized Flemish painting. 16th century? It is the work of an excellent hand; property of the chapel of the Relics, in the parish church, patronage of the former lords of the borough<sup>57</sup>.

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52 *Inventario, tasación y venta de los bienes familiares del primer Conde de los Arcos*, 1632-1639. Madrid, Archive of the Instituto de Valencia de Don Juan, mss. 26-V-24, fol. 24r.

53 Cedillo 1959. The count of Cedillo, descendant of the counts of Fuensalida and related to the Marquis of Lozoya, who provided a prologue for his book, was a Doctor in Philosophy and Letters and belonged to the group of Archivers and Archaeologists. His remarkable knowledge of Toledo prompted the Town Council to award him the title of Chronicler of Toledo and he was one of the founders of the Sociedad Española de Excursiones (Spanish Society of Excursions) in 1893.

54 *Ibid.*, pp. 66-73, nos. 104-110.

55 “The great square chapel of the Relics, decorated with four pilasters, on which rest pendentives and dome, is Greco-Roman, late 16th century or early 17th, the architecture offering no unusual or notable feature”. *Ibid.*, pp. 67 and 68.

56 “In the same church, in the chapel of the Relics: Reproduction of the great retable of the Monastery of El Escorial, done in hard, painted wood”. *Ibid.*, p. 70.

57 *Ibid.*, p. 71. In her study of the chapel of Relics, Antonia Ríos de Balmaseda echoes Cedillo’s words: “In the same Catalogue of Monuments, it states that also belonging to the chapel was a panel painted by an unidentified Renaissance painter, which showed the Virgin Mary holding the Child Jesus in Her arms, and offering Him a rose in the presence of Saint Joseph”. Ríos de Balmaseda 1991, p. 136.



22. Members of the Board of Confiscation with the Municipal Council, Cuerva, Toledo Cultural Heritage Institute of Spain, Ministry of Culture, Madrid

Certainly this paragraph suggests Cedillo is describing Gossart's *The Holy Family*. Despite not recognising the artist, he does judge it to be "the work of an excellent hand"; the measurements coincide perfectly with the work, which strengthens the identification. By categorically stating that the panel was "property of the chapel of the Relics", the author unequivocally avoids any potential misinterpretation about ownership arising from it being in deposit at the convent when he saw it. Cedillo probably obtained this information from the archive in Santiago church, practically destroyed years later during the Spanish Civil War, along with the Carmelite convent and its library. This also seems to confirm the hypothesis that Gossart's panel must have been one of the paintings decorating the chapel of Relics; it was probably re-housed in the convent for security reasons<sup>58</sup>.

Shortly after the Civil War broke out in July 1936, the community of Carmelites in Cuerva was ordered to leave the convent for fear of popular uprisings and the uncontrolled burning of churches and convents, which explains why part of the community took refuge in the Discalced Carmelites convent in Durango, in the province of Biscay<sup>59</sup>. At such critical moments, the authorities, aware of the danger to works of art and in order to protect them from destruction, issued a Decree on 23 July 1936 creating the Board for the Confiscation and Protection of Artistic Works. One of the first measures taken was to collect the works of greatest artistic interest and take them to a safe place. The Board appointed Thomas Malonyay to deal with confiscations in the towns and villages of the province of Toledo<sup>60</sup>, Cuerva included<sup>61</sup>. Malonyay, who fought hard to protect the artistic heritage of Toledo, arrived in Cuerva on 28 February 1937 [fig. 22] and took the works considered most valuable, including Gossart's panel, number 10 of twelve altogether [fig. 23]:

10 The Holy Family, panel Flemish school, mid-15th. School of Mabuse? (split).

The works were taken to Madrid and Gossart's painting deposited in the Prado, whose acting director throughout the Civil War was Francisco Javier Sánchez Cantón. In the photograph of the work as it arrived

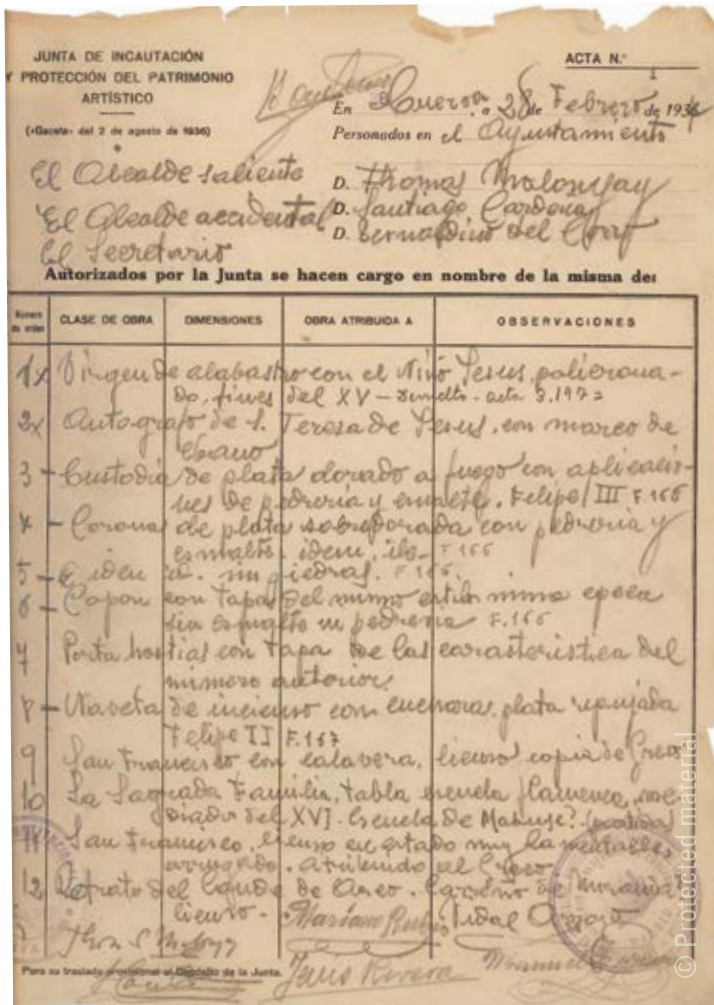
58 Our thanks to the Mother Superior and Deputy Prioress of the convent in Cuerva for their kindness and for every facility offered during our consultation of their archive.

59 Antonia Ríos de Balmaseda informed us orally that the nuns of Cuerva first set up in Bergara and later in Durango, where they remained until they returned to Cuerva in 1945. The convent in Durango was abandoned in 2009.

60 On Thomas Malonyay's efforts on behalf of the Junta de Incautación y Protección del Patrimonio Artístico (Board for the Confiscation and Protection of Artistic Works), see Álvarez Lopera 2008, reproduced at <http://revistas.ucm.es/ghi/02146452/articulos/ANHA0808120535A.PDF> (consulted: 10/03/2011).

61 On this subject, see Álvarez Lopera 1982, vol. II, pp. 98 and 100. See also Argerich/Ara 2009, p. 223.





23. Deed confiscating works collected in Cuerva, Toledo  
Board of Confiscation of the Artistic Heritage,  
28 February 1937  
Cultural Heritage Institute of Spain,  
Ministry of Culture, Madrid

at the Prado [fig. 24] the panel is clearly broken, as the bracketed word at the end of the entry makes clear. Also visible is the small label with the reference and number applied: "Cuerva 10". Researcher Diego Angulo Íñiguez, a friend and collaborator of Sánchez Cantón, must have inspected the painting when it was in the Prado, advertising its existence and being the first to attribute it to Jan Gossart in an article published in the *Archivo Español de Arte y Arqueología*<sup>62</sup>, journal edited by Sánchez Cantón. Angulo noted that the panel from the convent at Cuerva was "one of the many works saved from destruction by the Board for Artistic Treasure of Madrid [...]. I am unaware of the exact date *The Holy Family* from Cuerva entered the convent. The monastery was founded by Aldonza Niño de Guevara, sister of the famous inquisitor portrayed by El Greco, and whose son Rodrigo Niño y Lasso, Count of Añover († 1620), who built the important chapel of the relics, spent many years in the Low Countries, where he gave up his soul to his Creator. His remains were buried in the convent of the Carmelites in Brussels, although today there is also a stone in the church of the convent in Toledo, perhaps because they were later repatriated [see note 36]. So it would not be surprising that the panel reproduced here is a keepsake of his time in Flanders, although, in truth, this is largely beside the point when explaining the presence of a work by Gossart in a Castile monastery"<sup>63</sup>.

62 "La Sagrada Familia del convento de Cuerva, por Gossaert" in Angulo 1937, 2nd epigraph, pp. 194-197, lam. III. The director of the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum from 1949 to 1973, Crisanto Lasterra, records Angulo's opinion in Lasterra 1969, pp. 50 and 51, cat. 110.

63 Angulo 1937, pp. 194 and 196. The painting was included in *L'art Flamand dans les Collections Espagnoles*, held at the Musée Communal des Beaux-Arts, Groeninge-Bruges in 1958, Angulo being a member of the Spanish organizing committee. In the exhibition catalogue the work is described as coming from the church at Cuerva (no. 33, p. 65).



24. Photograph of the (split) work in the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum on its arrival at the Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, 1937  
Cultural Heritage Institute of Spain, Ministry of Culture, Madrid

During its time in the Prado, the painting was restored in 1939, as Sánchez Cantón notes in his report, where he mentions it with other work from Cuerva, including the “San Francisco del Greco”<sup>64</sup>. Likewise, the report on the Prado sent to the International Directorate of Museums states that, as part of its labours on works in deposit, the Prado’s restoration workshop had attended to the works from Cuerva.

With the war over, as a sort of replacement for works from the Prado, then in Geneva for an exhibition and not scheduled to return to Madrid until 9 September 1939, an exhibition was inaugurated on 6 July 1939 that included “paintings from churches and museums from a number of places in Spain”<sup>65</sup> restored at the Prado. The modest catalogue produced by Sánchez Cantón for the occasion includes *The Holy Family*<sup>66</sup>.

Meanwhile, the convent at Cuerva had been badly damaged, so much so that the community was unable to return until after it had been restored in 1945. In their search for financing, the nuns began to take the steps necessary to recover their paintings, still in deposit in the Prado, and put them up for sale. The Bilbao Fine

64 “Although this is not the occasion to analyze the work done in the workshop I shall list some of the major tasks undertaken: restoration of the *Epiphany* from the Retable of Yepes, by Luis Tristán, which arrived at the Museum in seven pieces; of the *St. Francis* by El Greco, from Cuerva; of the panel by Gossaert from the same convent; the *Pietà* by Morales, brought from Polán; of the paintings in El Escorial: the *Table of the Capital Sins* by Bosch and the *Insults* by the same artist; the paintings by Moretto and the *Christ Washing the Disciples’ Feet* by Tintoretto; the panels from the retable of Cardinal Mendoza from San Ginés in Guadalajara, and from Illescas a portrait by Pantoja and the *Ecce-Homo* by Morales”. “El Museo del Prado, desde el 18 de julio de 1.936 hasta el 28 de marzo de 1.938”, *Memoria de Sánchez Cantón*, Archive MNP, C. 1423, leg. 11.283, exp. 5, fol. 22, note 1. Our thanks are due to Javier Docampo, Head of the Library, Archive & Documentation Area at the Prado, for sending this and other documents relating to Gossart’s panel.

65 Madrid 1939, p. III.

66 It was exhibited in gallery XLII and is described in the catalogue: “Jan Gossart de Maubeuge, called ‘Mabuse’. H. 1478—1533-6. The Holy Family. T. 0.56 x 0.41. Convent of the Carmelites at Cuerva (Toledo). The Virgin and Saint Joseph, figures of more than half length. Background of Renaissance architectures. Linked to the panel in the Prado, no. 1930 [in reference to the Virgin with the Child, by the same artist, fig. 4]. Studied by Diego Angulo in Archive, 1937. p. 194-7. Plate XVI”. *Ibid.*, p. 43, plate XVI.

Arts Museum soon showed interest in acquiring the Gossart panel and *Saint Francis at prayer before the Crucified Christ* by El Greco. The first reference to these works appears in the minutes of the Museum dated 11 October 1939:

The Board acknowledges the offer of several works of art today in deposit in the Museum and of a work by El Greco and a panel of the Flemish School owned by the Community of Carmelite nuns from the Convent of La [sic] Cuerva (Toledo), works at present on display in the Prado Museum in Madrid, and agrees, concerning the latter offer, that the Director, Mr. Losada, should go to Madrid to examine the works and decide whether they should be acquired by the Museum<sup>67</sup>.

On 20 October, Manuel Losada journeyed to Madrid to examine them; on his return he gave his very favourable verdict, and the Museum soon began the procedure to acquire them<sup>68</sup>. As the convent at Cuerva was still closed, the community had to negotiate from the convent in Durango, where the mother superior and part of the community had taken shelter<sup>69</sup>. The minutes of a meeting held on 26 October state that Losada's report on the two paintings inspected in the Prado, "a Saint Francis by El Greco and a Holy Family by Gossart", greatly favoured the acquisition<sup>70</sup> and the minutes from 6 November record the approval of the steps taken by Lorenzo Hurtado de Saracho, vice-chairman of the Board of the Museum, in Madrid to buy both paintings for 125,000 pesetas<sup>71</sup>.

According to a document dated 18 November issued by the Directorate General for the Fine Arts, the Museum of Bilbao had already made the acquisition, although the paintings remained for the moment in the Prado and the then director general for Fine Arts began to pressure to get them returned to the nuns of Cuerva, who "quite rightly want them back urgently because they have been sold to the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum to collect the financial resources needed to restart their community life." As the paintings had been restored at the Prado, the Directorate General added in the same document that the Carmelites "should pay the National Museum of the Prado the costs incurred during the restoration of the works in question" [fig. 25]. The return of the paintings to the community of Cuerva was eventually formalized on 25 November 1939, as two documents of that date testify. One of them, issued by the Prado, registers the delivery of the paintings, "property of the Discalced Carmelite nuns of Cuerva (Toledo)", to the General Administration of the National Artistic Heritage Defence Service, and urged the Service to deliver to them "the paintings in question" [fig. 26]. The other document, issued by the General Administration, registers the delivery to the prioress of the Carmelites of Cuerva, Teresa of Jesus, owner of the paintings [fig. 27]. Payment for both works by the Museum of Bilbao went through on 2 December: "To the Revd. Mother Teresa Valenciaga, for a painting

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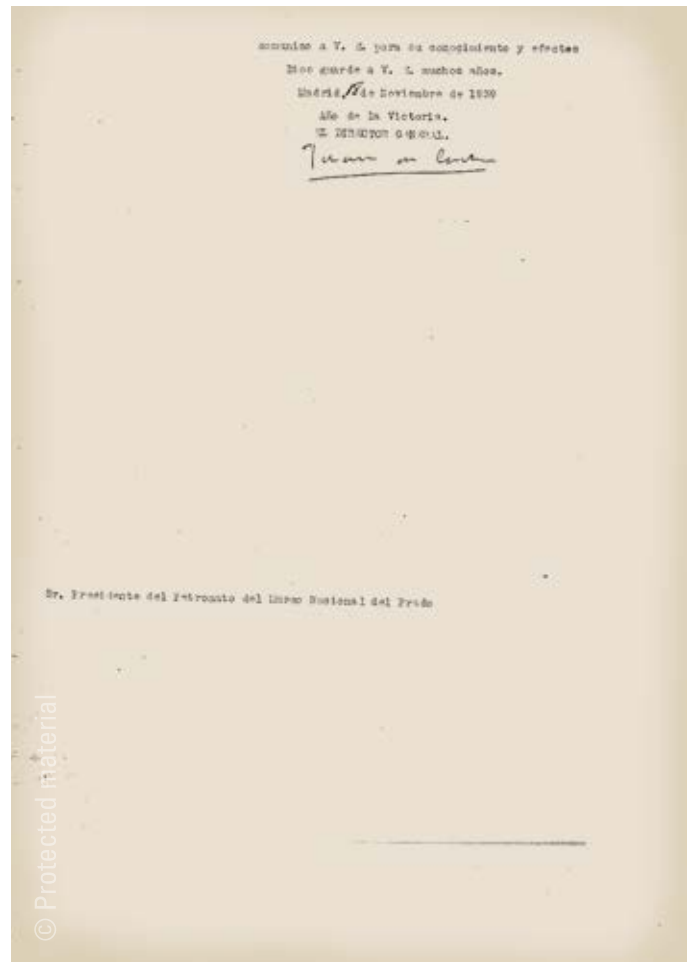
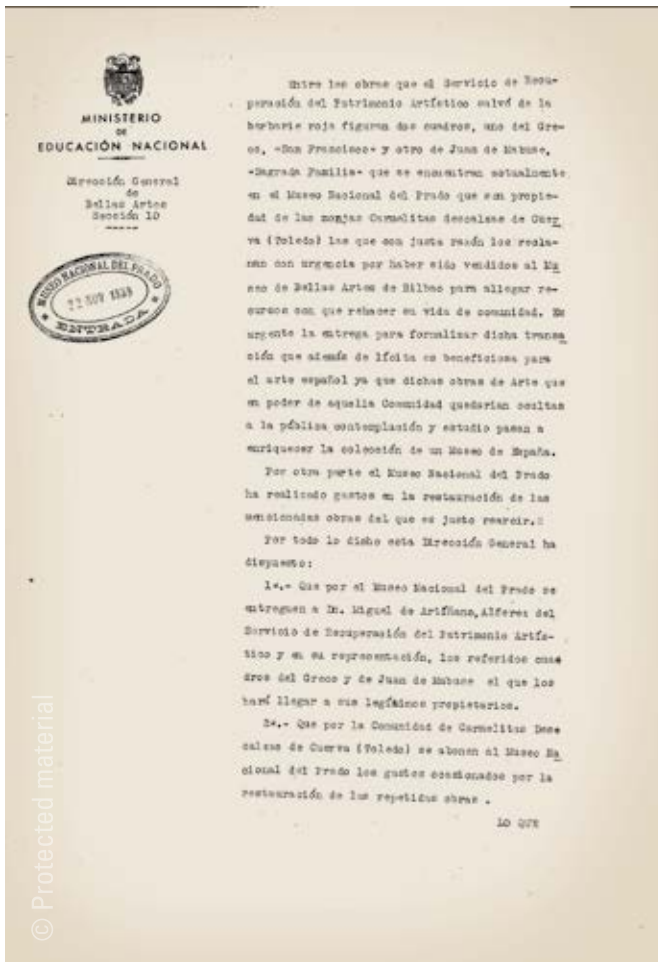
67 Minutes from 11 October 1939, p. 69. *Libro de Actas, Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao* (from 21 August 1923 to 24 January 1947).

68 "October 20 – Director travels to and stays in Madrid for the acquisition of two paintings". *Bilbao Fine Arts Museum. Revenues and Expenses 1939, section entitled "Acquisitions and Restorations"*.

69 It is possible that Esteban Bilbao Eguía (Bilbao, 1879-Durango, 1970), president of the Biscay Provincial Council from 1926 to 1930 and Minister of Justice from August 1939, acted in the negotiations as intermediary, and may even have been the person who informed the Museum Board of the nuns' desire to sell the paintings. Bilbao Eguía had close links with Durango through his marriage, and was buried in the cemetery of the monastery of the Discalced Carmelites there. Our thanks are due to Antonia Ríos de Balmaseda for this suggestion.

70 "The Board acknowledges the report from Direction on the two paintings offered to the Museum, which Mr. Losada has examined at the Prado in Madrid where they are exhibited. The paintings are: a St. Francis by El Greco and a Holy Family by Gossart. The report favours the acquisition of the two works, and it is agreed to acquire them for 110,000 pesetas as a basis for negotiation, Mr. Hurtado de Saracho being authorized to lower or increase reasonably said amount according to the circumstances". Minutes for 26 October 1939, p. 70. *Libro de Actas, Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao* (from 21 August 1923 to 24 January 1947). The negotiations for the works ended with an "aumento prudencial" (a reasonable increase) of 15,000 pesetas on the initial sum offered.

71 "To approve the dealings of Mr. Hurtado de Saracho in Madrid to acquire a painting by El Greco and another by Gossart for 125,000 pesetas for both works and apply for loans from the Vizcaina and Municipal savings banks for the sum of 62,500 pts for each one, and the corresponding guarantee from the Provincial Council and the City Council, with a view to making the payment for said acquisition; and that he authorize with his signature these loans". Minutes from 6 November 1939, p. 71. *Libro de Actas, Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao* (from 21 August 1923 to 24 January 1947).



25. Document by the Directorate General for Fine Arts, 18 November 1939  
 Archive, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, box 93, exp. 2



*Duplicado*

**MUSEO NACIONAL DEL PRADO.**

Cumpliendo lo dispuesto en la Orden de la Dirección General de Bellas Artes, fecha 1º del actual, con esta fecha se hace entrega a la Comisión General del Servicio de Defensa del Patrimonio Artístico Nacional, de los cuadros:


"SAN FRANCISCO" del GRECO  
 "SAGRADA FAMILIA" de JUAN DE MAJURI.

Que se encuentran en este Museo depositados, y que son propiedad de las monjas Carmelitas Descalzas de CUERVA (Toledo), con el fin de que el Servicio haga entrega a las mismas de los mentados cuadros.

Madrid a 25 de noviembre de 1939  
 AÑO DE LA VICTORIA.

RECIBI.

*Pedro Inguanzo*



Expediente n.º 370

**RECIBO N.º 377**

de la entrega a D. Carmelitas Descalzas de Cuerva (Toledo).  
 Depósito Museo del Prado.  
 de los cuadros que reconocen de su propiedad.

**EXENTO DE DERECHOS**

N.º de obra	OBJETOS	N.º de Hoja	Distancia
1	Sagrada Familia.- 60 x 40.- Flamenco del XVI.	4224	7730-3
2	San Francisco de Asis en oracion.-100 x 90.- El Greco.	4225	En etiqueta. Tejuelo II.

**EXENTO DE DERECHOS**



ENTRÉGUENSE

Madrid, a 25 de noviembre de 1939.

RECIBI.

El propietario,  
*Fernán de los Ríos de las Carmelitas Descalzas de Cuerva (Toledo)*

Por la Comisión General del Servicio de Defensa del P. A. N.  
*F. J. P. [Signature]*

26-27. File for the return of works to the Discalced Carmelites of Cuerva, Toledo Art Recovery Service, 25 November 1939  
 Cultural Heritage Institute of Spain, Ministry of Culture, Madrid

by El Greco and another by Gossart, 125,000 [pesetas]<sup>72</sup>. From the minutes of 7 February 1940, we know that while Manuel Losada in person had collected Gossart's panel in Madrid, the El Greco painting was still awaiting suitable packing for shipment<sup>73</sup>.

These proceedings demonstrate the interest of the Board of the Museum in the works, despite the economic difficulties of the time, which also affected the Museum in Bilbao, still without a decent home to exhibit its collection, much less its recent acquisitions, which, given their importance, were provisionally displayed on easels<sup>74</sup>.

In conclusion, it is fair to say that, besides providing stylistic information that helps us to put the painting into the context of the master's production as a whole, this in-depth examination of *The Holy Family* by Jan Gossart also analyses some interesting technical aspects. We have also tried to reconstruct its history, although we still do not know when the painting arrived in Spain, its final destination being Cuerva. It might have come through the family of Mariana de Mendoza, or, more or less in line with Angulo's suggestion, Rodrigo Niño Lasso might have acquired it during his time in Flanders and sent it as a gift to his sister-in-law Mariana de Mendoza, which would explain why the painting is not mentioned in his will. What has been documented is that it belonged to the powerful Lasso de la Vega family, who esteemed it highly, and that it was kept for centuries in the church and the enclosed convent they built in Cuerva. Finally, it came to the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum, where it substantially enhanced the collection of 16th century Flemish painting, of which it is now one of the most representative works.

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72 *Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao. Cuenta de ingresos y Gastos del año 1939, 2 December, section on "Adquisiciones y Restauraciones"*. The minutes of the Museum of Bilbao Board meeting dated 2 December state the Caja de Ahorros Municipal savings bank had granted the loan requested "for the acquisition of two paintings in Madrid": "Id. [the Board of the Fine Arts Museum acknowledges] of an official letter from the same [City Council] informing us of its agreement to the loan granted to the Museum by the Caja de Ahorros Municipal savings bank for the acquisition of two paintings in Madrid". Minutes for 2 December 1939, p. 71. *Libro de Actas, Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao* (from 21 August 1923 to 24 January 1947).

73 "The Board acknowledges receipt of the report by the Direction of the Museum on the steps taken in Madrid to bring the recently acquired paintings, Mr. Losada bringing with him personally the panel by Jan Gossart, which was examined by those present with great pleasure [...]". Minutes for 7 February 1940, p. 73v. *Libro de Actas, Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao* (from 21 August 1923 to 24 January 1947).

74 "In January the two masterworks acquired in Madrid in December the previous year, Saint Francis by El Greco and the Holy Family by Gossart, arrived in Bilbao, where they are displayed on easels in the Museum of Modern Art". See the *Memoria presentada por la Junta del Museo de Bellas Artes correspondiente al año 1.940*, 1941.

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