



11. *Mars and Venus with Cupid*, by Paolo Veronese. c.1565–70. Oil on canvas, 48 by 39.5 cm. (Galleria Sabauda, Turin; exh. Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid).

female figure shrouded in a vibrant yellow cloak. She is identified in the catalogue as representing Synagogue despite the fact that she is neither blindfolded, nor wearing a broken crown nor holding the broken tablets of the Ten Commandments. It is more likely that she is meant to function as a guide to the spiritual journey from the suffering of the Virgin to the sacrifice of Christ.⁹

Veronese's last altarpiece, the *Miracle of St Pantaleon* (1588; no.91) was commissioned in 1587 by the parish priest Bartolomeo Borghi for S. Pantalon, Venice, where it remains today. 'Miracle' is perhaps a bit of a misnomer, since the picture does not depict the miraculous salvation of the young boy bitten by the vicious winged viper in the right corner. Rather it depicts the moment when the physician Pantaleon realises that his earthly remedies – held in the box offered by his page – will not save the boy and that only his prayers to God can revive him. It is at this moment that Pantaleon converts to Christianity, symbolised by the timely arrival of an angel with a martyr's palm in a burst of divine light, which illuminates the face of the young boy held in the arms of Borghi. The collapse of the pagan world and the futility of past medical practices is further underscored by the inclusion of a broken statue representing Aesculapius, the

Greek god of medicine, which was based on a statuette of the god in the Grimani collection.¹⁰

The *Miracle of St Pantaleon* would have made a triumphant ending to the exhibition, since it shows that even in the last months of his life Veronese was able to manipulate his brush with exquisite brilliance. Instead, the final room of the exhibition is something of an anticlimax, as it is devoted to Veronese's legacy and the production of his family workshop, which continued to sign pictures 'Haeredes Pauli' until the end of the century. An undated letter from Paolo's brother Benedetto to Giacomo Contarini explains how the collaboration among family members worked: after the patron had chosen a subject, Benedetto would make sketches, his nephew Carletto would transfer the ideas to the canvas and his other nephew Gabriele would complete the painting.¹¹ As Falomir notes in his essay on Veronese's legacy, modern technical studies have questioned the accuracy of this account. Nevertheless, a variety of hands can be spotted in such works as the *Wedding feast at Cana* (after 1588; Prado; no.95), which, like so many paintings attributed to the heirs, is repetitive, flat and inferior to Paolo's own work in every way.

There are always pluses and minuses when an exhibition is conceived for the general public. In this case the Prado has made the laudable decision to ban photography. This gives viewers a welcome respite from over-zealous mobile phone users, who are, instead, looking at the paintings and reading the labels. This is a double bonus since the labels are clear and informative and, like the catalogue, are in both Spanish and English. It is sad that they were not also reproduced on the blank pages opposite images in the catalogue, which contains no entries, no provenance and no selected bibliography. Although some information is buried in the essays, it is not easy to ferret out and does not exist for every object. Despite the shortcomings of the catalogue, the exhibition itself could not be better summed up than by the speech on Veronese that Jean Nocret delivered

to the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture, Paris, in October 1667, when he declared 'that there is nothing which at first glance does not surprise the eye and charm the mind'.¹²

1 M. Boschini: *Le ricche minere della pittura veneziana*, Venice 1674, ed. A. Pallucchini, Rome 1966, pp.732–33.

2 D. Rosand: *Paolo Veronese*, London 2023, p.33.

3 B.L. Brown: 'The view from behind: Veronese, Giulio Romano and the Rape of Europa', *Artibus et Historiae* 74 (2016), pp.207–22. The catalogue, p.10, suggests that the figure is derived from a print by Dürer without sighting which one. This reviewer assumes that they mean the *Presentation of Christ in the Temple*, where a differently draped figure embraces a column.

4 Catalogue: *Paolo Veronese 1528–1588*. Edited by Enrico Maria Dal Pozzolo and Miguel Falomir. 456 pp. incl. 224 col. ills. (Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, 2025), €37. ISBN 978–84–8480–638–7. English edition: ISBN 978–84–8480–639–4.

5 The Washington exhibition was reviewed by Richard Cocke in this Magazine, 131 (1989), pp.61–64; the London and Verona shows were reviewed by Tom Nichols in this Magazine, 156 (2014), pp.682–86.

6 C. Ridolfi: *Le meraviglie dell'arte*, Venice 1648, ed. D. von Hadeln, Berlin 1914–24, I, p.307.

7 M. Di Monte: 'Le immagini in dettaglio: La pittura vista all distanza giusta', *Venezia Cinquecento* 22 (2012), pp.135–53.

8 Ridolfi, *op. cit.* (note 6), II, p.45.

9 C. Corsato: 'Colour of devotion: Veronese's Crucifixion in the Musée du Louvre', *Artibus et Historiae* 78 (2018), pp.125–40.

10 Others have suggested that it is based on a statue of Silenus in the Grimani collection, see for example W.R. Rearick: exh. cat. *The Art of Paolo Veronese 1528–1588*, Washington (National Gallery of Art) 1988, p.200.

11 P. Caliani: *Paolo Veronese: Sua vita e sue opere*, Rome 1888, pp.177–78, n.2. The original letter in the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venice (Cod.XI, n.90) has disappeared.

12 J. Lichtenstein and C. Michel, eds: *Les Conférences au temps d'Henry Testelin: 1648–1681*, Paris 2006, I, p.149.

Painted Gold: El Greco and Art between Crete and Venice

Palazzo Ducale, Venice
30th April–29th September

by GEORGIOS E. MARKOU

Gold (*oro*) has long shimmered at the heart of Venice's visual vocabulary and cultural lexicon. From S. Marco's Pala d'Oro to the Ca' d'Oro and *oro di Cipro* (Cypriot gold), it embodies both aesthetic splendour and symbolic depth in the imagination of residents and visitors alike. As a foundational element of Byzantine art, an idiom to which Venetians turned in the eleventh century to shape their own visual language, gold carried connotations

of divine light, eternity and sanctity. Byzantine icons, in particular, portable in format and with deep historical and devotional resonance, functioned as agents of spiritual transmission and artistic influence, linking sacred and artistic centres across the Mediterranean. Typically imported into Venice from key Greek islands within its maritime dominion (*Stato da Mar*), especially Candia (modern-day Crete), although at times produced locally, these icons adorned both domestic interiors and ecclesiastical spaces throughout the city, becoming enduring fixtures of collective piety and individual devotion.

This exhibition, curated by Chiara Squarcina, Katerina Dellaporta and Andrea Bellieni, traces the rich history of Cretan icons and icon-painting from the early fifteenth to the eighteenth century, unravelling the complex entanglement of faith, artistic exchange and Mediterranean

connectivity. Set within the majestic ducal apartments of the Palazzo Ducale, it unfolds across seven thematically and chronologically arranged sections that trace the way in which the circulation of artists, icons and devotional practices between Crete and Venice shaped traditional icon painting. Featuring over one hundred works – including maps, manuscripts, medals and coins as well as icons and other paintings – the exhibition invites viewers to reconsider gold not merely as a symbol of splendour but as a medium of transcultural dialogue and spiritual significance.

The exhibition opens with an introduction to Crete, foregrounding both the physical realities and the administrative structures of the Venetian presence, while establishing a visual foundation in Byzantine art through a selection of early-fifteenth-century icons. In the concluding part of the first section, the narrative

shifts to examine the second half of the fifteenth century, when Cretan painters began to move beyond strict Byzantine conventions and engage with Western Gothic influences. Among the featured artists is Andreas Ritzos (c.1421–1492), whose well-studied and compelling JHS panel (Byzantine and Christian Museum, Athens; cat. no.1b.4), painted in Athens in the second half of the fifteenth century, exemplifies how the sacred landscape of Venetian Candia, shaped in part by mendicant friars, fostered visual expressions that bridged Latin and Greek spirituality. A similar coexistence is reflected in the nearby *Virgin and Child enthroned between St Catherine and St Lucy* (no.2.4; Fig.14), in which the inscriptions for the Virgin and St Catherine appear in Greek, whereas Lucy is labelled in Latin, suggesting a keen sensitivity to the island's multilingual and multicultural devotional practices. This section

12. *Wedding feast at Cana*, by Michael Damaskinos. 1575–80. Tempera and oil on canvas and panel, 79.5 by 115.5 cm. (Museo Correr, Venice; exh. Palazzo Ducale, Venice).



Exhibitions

showcases the distinctive ability of Cretan masters to weave together diverse religious traditions with transcultural visual forms, inviting visitors to reconsider fixed notions of identity and appreciate the fluidity of borders in Early Modern Candia and the Mediterranean at large.

In the sixteenth century this artistic synthesis intensified. Cretan painters increasingly blended Byzantine traditions with Western stylistic elements, shaped by their exposure to printed imagery as well as by direct encounters with Italian art, as illustrated in the following three sections. Such prominent figures as Georgios Klontzas (1530–1608) and Michael Damaskinos (1530–92), who spent his life between Venice and Candia, exemplify the fertile interplay of artistic traditions that defined the period. Damaskinos, in

particular, stands as a testament to the adaptability of these masters, capable of working across a range of techniques and stylistic registers. His *Wedding feast at Cana* (no.4.2; Fig.12), a composition based on Jacopo Tintoretto's celebrated painting for the refectory of the Crociferi (1561; S. Maria della Salute, Venice) – not illustrated in either the exhibition or catalogue – is a prime example of such cross-cultural engagement. It is displayed here alongside a selection of Damaskinos's icons, highlighting his command of both Italianate and traditional Byzantine forms.

At the heart of this artistic evolution stands Domenikos Theotokopoulos (1541–1614), better known as El Greco, the most celebrated figure of the Cretan School. Trained within the post-Byzantine tradition, El Greco's move to Venice in 1567

proved decisive. There he absorbed the innovations of local masters, a pivotal phase in his stylistic development prior to his move to Rome and ultimately to Spain, where he achieved acclaim. In the fifth section, six works associated with him are presented in an effort to chart his stylistic evolution from Candia to Toledo in the early years of the seventeenth century. However, none reflects his early use of gold or engagement with Byzantine iconographic conventions, aspects of his practice that would have been apparent had the exhibition included his *St Luke painting the Virgin* (1560–66; Benaki Museum, Athens) or *Dormition of the Virgin* (1565–66; Holy Cathedral of the Dormition of the Virgin, Hermoupolis).

The sixth section focuses on the profound impact of the Morean Wars and the Ottoman conquest of Candia

13. *St Demetrius with scenes of the saint's life and the donor's portrait*, by Emmanuel Tzanes. 1646. Tempera and oil on panel, 76.5 by 107 cm. (Byzantine and Christian Museum, Athens; exh. Palazzo Ducale, Venice).



in 1669, which led to the displacement of many Cretan painters to other Venetian-controlled territories, most notably the Ionian islands, including Corfu and Zakynthos. Such artists as Theodoros Poulakis (1620–92) and the priest Emmanuel Tzanes (1610–90) continued to cultivate and transform the Cretan tradition in these new settings, with some eventually establishing themselves in Venice, where a thriving Greek community provided support and patronage. Tzanes, who moved between Venice and Corfu, represents the next generation of masters, who both preserved and reinterpreted the iconographic legacy of Crete. Among his works in the exhibition is a striking *St Demetrius* (no.6b.2; Fig.13), which encapsulates the diverse influences that define the late phase of the tradition: the central figure of the horse-riding saint retains the hierarchical posture of Byzantine iconography; the surrounding scenes, rendered with Western spatial logic and perspectival depth, narrate the saint's martyrdom in a way designed to engage the viewer emotionally and didactically; and the donor, depicted in Venetian attire of the seventeenth century, appears within an illusionistic frame that echoes Baroque portrait conventions.

The seventh section, devoted to the Greek community in Venice and centred on their church, S. Giorgio dei Greci, presents archival sources, architectural plans and artefacts illustrating its cultural heritage. This is followed by a display that explores the icon as an object, examining its material composition and technical execution. It offers visitors rare insight into the craftsmanship, scientific study and enduring resonance of a centuries-old tradition of sacred image-making, conveyed through interactive video presentations.

The exhibition successfully communicates its overarching themes, but more detailed labels providing information about the individual works would have enhanced contextual understanding and deepened visitor engagement. In addition, a more profound exploration of artistic connections between the featured



14. *Virgin enthroned with Child between St Catherine and St Lucy*. Crete, mid-15th century. Tempera and oil on panel, 60 by 61 cm. (Byzantine and Christian Museum, Athens; exh. Palazzo Ducale, Venice).

artists would have strengthened the narrative. In the case of El Greco, for instance, Klontzas – who is represented by two works, one autograph and one attributed – served as one of the appraisers of El Greco's now lost *Passion of Christ*, executed on a gold background and evaluated in Candia on 27th December 1566, shortly before the artist's departure for Venice.¹ Likewise, Georgios Kalapodas (also called Georgio Sideri and Callapoda da Candia), whose map is on display in the exhibition's opening room (1562; Museo Correr, Venice; no.ST.I.4), is one of the few documented collaborators of El Greco in Candia.² Such connections, had they been more fully drawn out, would have offered visitors a deeper appreciation of the complex web of artistic exchange that shaped the cultural landscape presented in the exhibition. On the other hand, the catalogue offers valuable overviews that complement the exhibition effectively.³ A particular highlight is the inclusion of three essays by the late Maria Constantoudaki-Kitromilides, a pioneering scholar of many of the featured artists. Her contributions are a fitting culmination of a distinguished scholarly career, embodying the intellectual clarity, depth and critical acumen for which she will be remembered.

Icons were an integral component of Venetian visual culture. They were versatile, mobile and adaptable to a

wide array of devotional, commercial and aesthetic contexts. Far from being static relics of a bygone tradition, the works assembled in this exhibition reveal the extraordinary dynamism of their makers, who responded with creativity and nuance to shifting tastes, religious needs and the demands of transregional exchange. The exhibition compellingly demonstrates that Cretan painters were not passive preservers of Byzantine heritage, nor merely precursors to the singular figure of El Greco. Instead, they emerge as active agents in the broader landscape of Early Modern artistic production, negotiating inherited conventions and contemporary innovations with remarkable sophistication. By tracing their movements, as well as their stylistic and iconographic evolutions, *Painted Gold* invites a reassessment of the so-called peripheries of Renaissance art, positioning the Cretan School as central to understanding the cultural fluidity and artistic plurality of the Early Modern Mediterranean.

1 'un quadro della Passione del nostro Signor Gesu Christo, dorato', M. Constantoudaki: 'Dominicos Thèotocopoulos (El Greco) de Candie à Venise: Documents inédits (1566–1568)', *Thesaurismata* 12 (1975), pp.292–308, at p.296.

2 In 1568 El Greco supplied Kalapodas with drawings for an unidentified project; see *ibid.*, p.306.

3 Catalogue: *L'oro dipinto: El Greco e la pittura tra Creta e Venezia*. Edited by Chiara Squarcina, Katerina Dellaporta and Andrea Bellieni. 288 pp. incl. numerous col. ills. (Antiga Edizioni, Crocetta del Montello and Treviso, 2025), €35. ISBN 978–88–8435–525–6.

Artus Quellinus: Sculptor of Amsterdam

Royal Palace, Amsterdam
8th June–27th October

by CHRISTOPHER BROWN

It is surely unusual, if not unique, for a retrospective to be held within a key work produced by the artist, but that is the case with this exhibition, a collaboration between Amsterdam's Royal Palace and the Rijksmuseum. Begun in 1648 – the year of the Treaty of Münster, which ended the Netherlands's long war of independence against Spain – and officially opened in 1655, the Royal