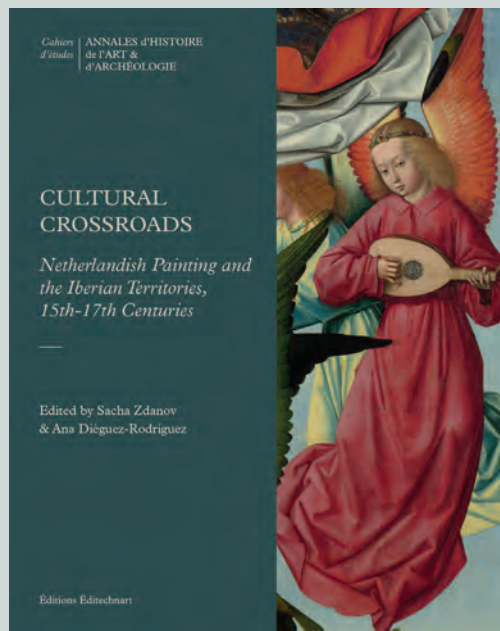


# Cultural Crossroads: Netherlandish Painting and the Iberian Territories, 15th-17th Centuries

*Papers from the First Study Day in the Series "Cultural Crossroads:  
Artistic Encounters between the Low Countries and Spain, 15th-17th Centuries",  
Brussels, 24 November 2023*

Edited by Sacha Zdanov & Ana Diéguez-Rodríguez



## PRE-ORDER

The book will be published at the end of October. Pre-orders are now open at a reduced price of €42.50 until 20 October (VAT included, plus shipping).

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This volume brings together several papers presented at the first international study day jointly organized by the Fondation Périer-D'Ieteren (Brussels) and the Instituto Moll (Madrid). The event took place within the framework of the Flemish Art in Spain project, launched in 2020 by the two institutions, whose aim is to catalogue works from the Low Countries, produced between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries, that are currently preserved in Spain.

Focusing on painting, the present volume examines the circulation of works of art, artists, and stylistic influences. The contributions cover a wide range of figures, from Bartolomé Bermejo and the Master of the Prado Redemption to Hans Memling. Further chapters are devoted to Ambrosius Benson, Pedro de Campaña, Willem Key, as well as Cornelis Schut, Peter van Lint, and Gaspar de Crayer. By

bringing these painters and their contexts into dialogue, the book sheds new light on little-known aspects of the artistic relationships between the Low Countries and Spain, thereby offering an essential contribution to the history of Flemish painting on the Iberian Peninsula.

The proceedings are published in collaboration with the Fondation Périer-D'Ieteren (Brussels) and the Instituto Moll (Madrid) as part of the Flemish Art in Spain project. The third study day, devoted to sculpture, will take place in Brussels on 28 November 2025, while the proceedings of the second study day, dedicated to tapestry, will be published in 2026.



## A NEW LOOK AT BARTOLOMÉ BERMEJO'S EARLY KNOWLEDGE OF EARLY NETHERLANDISH PAINTING

Nicola Jennings



1. Bartolomé Bermejo, *Pieta Desplá*, 1490, oil on poplar panel, 175.5 x 189.3 cm (Barcelona, Museo de la Catedral de Barcelona).

One of the most exciting and long-overdue exhibitions of the past few years was the Museo Nacional del Prado's *Bartolomé Bermejo*, the first in a series of splendid displays celebrating the gallery's 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary. With his creative appropriation of the visual vocabulary of Early Netherlandish masters such as Jan van Eyck and Rogier van der Weyden, Bermejo was the most technically skilled painter in Spanish Iberia in the fifteenth century. Where he acquired his expertise in oil painting and extensive knowledge of Early Netherlandish compositions, motifs and inscriptions is the subject of much debate. The Prado exhibition and its subsequent iterations in Barcelona and London suggested that Bermejo could have acquired this knowledge without ever leaving the Kingdom of Aragon and its nearby territories in the Western Mediterranean<sup>1</sup>. This paper refutes for the argument that suggestion, providing visual evidence that he travelled to Bruges at least once and is likely to have refined his knowledge of painting in oil by working as a journeyman for a few years in a Flemish workshop.

Bartolomé Bermejo, or Bartolomé de Cárdenas as he is often referred to in archival documents, was born in Cordoba, probably around 1440<sup>2</sup>. Although there is no record of his early life, there are several documents relating to the period from 1468 until his death c. 1501. During that time, he worked in Valencia, Barcelona, Saragossa and Daroca, often co-signing contracts with other less-skilled artists and, on one occasion, sentenced to excommunication for failure to deliver on time. The current thinking is that one of the reasons for his troubles may have been that he was a *converso* or converted Jew at a time when the Spanish Inquisition was beginning to make life very difficult for converts<sup>3</sup>.

Like many great Early Netherlandish painters whose work became unfashionable after the Renaissance, Bermejo's talent was only rediscovered in the nineteenth century. In 1839, the painting now known as the *Pieta Desplá* was discovered in a dark corner of the Casa de l'Arduca near Barcelona Cathedral<sup>4</sup> (fig. 1). With a commemorative inscription featuring Bermejo's name and Cordoban origins, it was hailed as proof of the achievements of Spanish art at the end of the fifteenth century, even if the painter did not yet appear in any biographical dictionaries. A few years later, Bermejo's *Saint Dominic of Silos*, from a parish church in Daroca in Aragon, entered the collection of the Museo Arqueológico in Madrid as an anonymous work, and in 1899 the South African magnate Julius Wehrner acquired the artist's *Saint Michael Triumphs over the Devil*, bearing the name "Bartolomeus Rubens", as the work of a Provençal master (figs 2 and 3). In Brussels, the Somée gallery attributed Bermejo's *Saint Eusebio* to an anonymous Flemish or Spanish master, selling it in 1904 to the American collector Isabella Stewart Gardner. In 1914, the Paris-based painter and collector Sáenz de Tejada sold four panels which had come from Guatemala to the Barcelona collector Teresa Amalier. These panels, of scenes on the theme of Christ the Redeemer, were soon attributed to Bermejo by Salvador Sanpere i Miquel<sup>5</sup> (fig. 4). Making this attribution possible was the fact that the name "Rubens" on the London *Saint Michael* had been recognized as Latin for the name "Bermejo" on the Barcelona *Pieta Desplá*, and the artist's signature had been found on the *Triumph of The Virgin of Montserrat* in the cathedral of Acqui Terme (fig. 5). Also in 1914, one of the contracts for *Saint Dominic of Silos* was published, naming

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13. Follower of Hans Memling (Michel Sittow?), *Man of Sorrow*, c. 1490, oil and gold leaf on panel, 53 x 37.7 cm (Granada, Royal Chapel).

14. Hans Memling, *Man of Sorrow*, 1475-1479, oil and gold leaf on panel, 27.4 x 19.9 cm (Melbourne, National Gallery of Victoria).



The image shows the Virgin holding the body of the dead Christ, surrounded by a symbolic display of the instruments of the Passion on a golden background<sup>16</sup>. Studies on the Granada panel have cast doubts on its attribution to Memling, suggesting that the version of the Man of Sorrow closest to the painter's style is the one now in the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne (fig. 14), dated to 1475 or 1479, and therefore from the artist's early period<sup>17</sup>. Meanwhile, the technical analysis has demonstrated that the Granada version was most likely painted on the Iberian peninsula by a follower of Memling or a member of his workshop working at the Castilian court<sup>18</sup>. In the Granada painting, remnants of the process of tracing the drawing of an unknown prototype model have been discovered, similar to other known versions of the *Man of Sorrow* from the Museo de Bellas Artes in Bilbao, the Principe Massimo collection in Rome and Cormatin Church.

A comparison of the details seen in the diptych with the *Lamentation* and the *Man of Sorrow* in the Royal Chapel in Granada, within the context of Memling's work, suggests that both paintings are very close to those he produced in the course of his late creative period. Likewise, there are evident similarities between these two panels and late Memling works, particularly in the faces of the figures in the upper register of the Nijera altarpiece (fig. 15). The artists behind all these works painted the details of the eyes and noses in a very similar way, giving the individuals portrayed distinctive features, although there are clear similarities between them. However, the Granada paintings (figs 16 and 17) are notable for their more pronounced use of drawing in details such as eyebrows and shading in the faces, and these qualities are not encountered in Memling's work from the late period of his career<sup>19</sup>. It can therefore be argued, albeit with a degree of caution, that the *Lamentation* diptych and the *Man of Sorrow*



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