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Est. 1760



Lucas Cranach the Younger
(Wittenberg, 1515 – 1586)

*Christ as the Man of Sorrows
with the Virgin Mary and
Saint John*

oil on panel, a fragment

31.5 x 73 cm.;

12 3/8 x 28 3/4 in.

signed with the artist's device of a
serpent with folded wings (upper left)

Provenance

Private collection, Munich;

Confiscated from the above on 18 November 1938 and allocated for the Kunstmuseum Linz (inv. 2550);

Recovered by the Monuments Men and sent to the Munich Central Collecting Point (inv. 4273), on 15 July 1945;

Transferred to Wiesbaden on 25 May 1949 and restituted to the heirs of the private collector on 2 December 1949;

By descent in the family;

By whom sold, New York, Sotheby's, 29 January 2016, lot 425, where acquired by the present owner.

Literature

G. Haase, *Die Kunstsammlung Adolf Hitler: eine Dokumentation*, Berlin 2002, p. 218;

H. C. Löhr, *Das Braune Haus der Kunst: Hitler und der "Sonderauftrag Linz": Visionen, Verbrechen, Verluste*, Berlin 2005, p. 130, citation no. 9.

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This intense, emotional depiction of Christ as a Man of Sorrows is an exciting new addition to the *oeuvre* of Lucas Cranach the Younger. The design, with Christ flanked by the Virgin on one side and Saint John the Evangelist on the other, originated with Lucas Cranach the Elder and was adapted at least three times by his son. The earliest manifestation of this type is the 1524 panel in the Augustiner Museum, Freiburg im Breisgau (fig. 1).¹ In that work Lucas Cranach the Elder depicts a landscape with a three-quarter length seated Christ in his tomb flanked by the Virgin and Saint John with a host of cherubs in the sky. The figures are close to the pictorial plane with the tortured body of Christ clearly on display, but the landscape setting serves to soften the portrayal of Christ as Man of Sorrows. In his second interpretation of the theme, executed ten years later in 1534, Cranach the Elder removed the landscape setting, thus heightening the emotional impact of the composition. There are, however, a host of cherubs with the attributes of the cross in a frieze-like formation at the top of the painting which visually draws the eye away from the central figures (fig. 2).²

Lucas Cranach the Younger's experimentations with this composition are close to his father's 1534 composition, but bear further resemblance to the Elder's versions in the Vatican and the collection of the Historical Society in Regensburg (figs. 3 & 4),³ where the figures have been brought even closer to the pictorial plane and the frieze of angels is reduced to a few small praying cherubs in each corner. Thus Christ's bruised and broken body becomes more of a feature standing out against the dramatic dark background. The present composition is clearly closely related to these versions but it comes closest, both compositionally and stylistically, to a later – *circa* 1540 – version in the Kunsthalle, Hamburg (fig. 5).⁴ At some point in its history our panel was likely cut down, and thus much of the lower register of the composition is no longer visible, but it is almost certain that as in the Hamburg version, Christ was originally seated on the just visible edge of his tomb with his hands loosely folded across his lap. Still clearly discernible, however, is his tortured expression of woe and his crucified body torn and bleeding. Mary and St. John flank Christ, with the former weeping into her robe and the latter with his hands clasped in prayer. Apart from the edge of the tomb the background is one of unrelieved darkness and the angels that featured in earlier compositions have disappeared.

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We are grateful to Dr. Dieter Koeplin for endorsing the attribution to Lucas Cranach the Younger, on the basis of photographs.

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Figure 1. Lucas Cranach the Elder, *Pfirtscher Altarpiece: Christ as the Man of Sorrows*, seated on a sarcophagus between the Virgin and St John, 1524.
Augustiner Museum, Freiburg im Breisgau

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Figure 2. Lucas Cranach the Elder, *Altarpiece of George the Bearded*, 1534.
Meissen Cathedral

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Figure 3. Lucas Cranach the Elder [or his workshop], *Christ as the Man of Sorrows, flanked by the Virgin and St John*, after 1537.
Pinacoteca Vaticana, Rome

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Figure 4. Lucas. Cranach the Elder, *Christ as the Man of Sorrows, flanked by the Virgin and St John*, after 1537. Art collection of the Historical Society, Regensburg

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Figure 5. Lucas Cranach the Elder [or the Younger?], *Christ as the Man of Sorrows, flanked by the Virgin and St John*, c. 1540. Kunsthalle, Hamburg

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Footnotes

¹ See M. J. Friedländer and J. Rosenberg, *The Paintings of Lucas Cranach*, London 1978, p. 101, cat. no. 156, pl. 156.

² Friedländer and Rosenberg 1978, pp. 112-3, cat. no. 219, pl. 219.

³ Friedländer and Rosenberg 1978, p. 146, cat. nos. 383 & 383A, pl. 383.

⁴ Friedländer and Rosenberg 1978, p. 146, cat. no. 384, pl. 384.