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Anthony van Dyck
(Antwerp 1599 – 1641 London)

The Penitent Saint Peter

c. 1616 – 1618

oil on canvas

201 x 136 cm.;

79 x 53 ½ in.

Provenance

Miguel de Neve (1589 – 1649), Seville, by 1637;

Endowed to his daughter, Luisa Francisca de Neve, by use of a *mayorazgo* dated to that same year;¹

By marriage to her husband, Juan Arias de Saavedra (1621 – 1687), I Marqués de Moscoso, Seville;

By descent to Joaquín Árias de Saavedra y Santa Cruz, V Marqués de Moscoso, XIII Conde de Castellar, Seville, as witnessed by the Papal Indulgence granted to him by the Archbishop of Seville in January 1774;

By direct descent to José Joaquín Arias de Saavedra y Araoz (1807 – 1879), VII Marqués de Moscoso, Seville;

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Thence by descent.

Literature

M. Díaz Padrón, 'Dos nuevas pinturas de Rubens y Van Dyck identificadas en España: 'San Pedro' y una segunda replica de la 'Adúltera'', *Archivo Español de Arte*, XLV, no. 180, 1972, pp. 336-337, plate 1, fig. 1, reproduced in black and white (as Peter Paul Rubens);

M. Díaz Padrón (ed.), *Pedro Pablo Rubens (1577-1640): exposicion homenaje*, exh. cat., Madrid 1977, p. 104, cat. no. 89, reproduced in black and white on p. 232 (as Peter Paul Rubens).

Exhibited

Madrid, Palacio de Velazquez (Parque del Retiro), *Pedro Pablo Rubens (1577 – 1640): exposicion homenaje*, December 1977 – March 1978, no. 89 (as Peter Paul Rubens).

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When exhibited in Madrid in 1977, this moving canvas depicting the *Penitent Saint Peter* was considered a work by Sir Peter Paul Rubens. However, its recent cleaning has revealed it to be a highly important work of Sir Anthony van Dyck's earliest artistic activity. Christopher Brown has confirmed the attribution and dates the painting to *circa* 1616 – 1618.

Van Dyck's precocious talent was obvious from an early age, with the young artist starting his apprenticeship with Hendrick van Balen (1573/5 – 1632), one of Antwerp's leading painters, in October 1609 at the age of ten. His *Self-portrait at the age of fourteen* demonstrates the level of mastery Van Dyck had honed by his early teens (fig. 1). It was Peter Paul Rubens, however, who was the most significant influence on Van Dyck's formative years. Their earliest documented collaboration dates to 1620, when they painted the now destroyed ceiling for the Jesuit Church in Antwerp. The contract for the work stipulated that Rubens' designs were to be executed by Rubens himself and by 'Van Dyck with some other pupils', though by this time Van Dyck was a studio assistant rather than a pupil, having registered in 1618 as a master with the Antwerp Guild of Saint Luke.² Indeed, his semi-independent status and fast-growing fame is conveyed by a letter written to the Earl of Arundel in July 1620, with the writer mentioning that Van Dyck was 'still staying with Rubens' and that his works 'were only valued slightly less than those of his master'.³

Though the year 1620 remains the earliest secure date for their collaboration, it is very likely that Van Dyck and Rubens were working together by late 1616 and possibly as early as 1612, when it has been posited that Van Dyck moved to Rubens' studio after his start with Van Balen.⁴ Indeed, the present work shows the crucial role Rubens was to play in the development of the young Van Dyck (though this aspect should not be overplayed, as Van Dyck was in many ways a truly original painter from the outset of his career).

Compositionally, the figure of Saint Peter clearly looks to the prophet Daniel from Rubens' magisterial canvas in the National Gallery of Art, Washington (fig. 2), and also goes some way in explaining the initial attribution of the *Penitent Saint Peter* to the older painter. Whether Van Dyck saw *Daniel in the Lion's Den* when it was in Rubens' studio in 1615 must remain a point of conjecture, though he surely had at hand a figure sketch or some other

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preparatory study for the monumental painting, so close are the two figures. Van Dyck borrows from Rubens the dynamically tilted body of Daniel, full of nervous energy, and, above all, the gesture of the clasped hands with interlocking fingers.

Within Van Dyck's own *oeuvre*, *Saint Peter* can be best related, compositionally and technically speaking, to the two versions of *Saint Jerome* executed c. 1618: the fully autograph *Saint Jerome* in the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen (fig. 3) and the version in the Nationalmuseum, Stockholm, possibly executed with assistance.⁵ Like the *Saint Peter*, these works present an imposing New Testament saint in deep spiritual contemplation, set against a rocky backdrop, with a sliver of landscape in the distance. In these three works, executed when Van Dyck was between seventeen and nineteen years old, one sees the confident and bravura brushwork, as well as the fluid, idealised and refined style, which form such an integral part of his best works. Here, he has moved on from the harsh and roughly applied brushstrokes of his earliest works: what Gustav Glück called his 'coarse style'.⁶ With *Saint Peter* and *Saint Jerome*, one can begin to talk of a period of early maturity, an incredible description on the face of it, given that we are describing an artist not yet twenty years of age.

A note on the provenance

The present painting has an impeccable, unbroken chain of provenance that dates back to the 17th century. New research has shown that it is listed in Miguel de Neve's *mayorazgo* of 1637 (as '*un cuadro de San Pedro, original del pintor Pedro Pablo Rubens*'), which endowed his daughter, Luisa Francisca de Neve (fig. 4), with some of his assets ahead of her marriage to Juan Arias de Saavedra, I Marqués de Moscoso (fig. 5).⁷

Of Flemish origin, the Neve family were an archetypal example of the foreign merchants who gradually settled in Seville from the end of the 15th century onwards, to participate in the business brought about by the trade routes between Spain and her colonies. They instituted chaplaincies, invested in a sumptuary life, acquired numerous works of art, and ended up allocating part of their patrimony to patronage.⁸ In this particular area, canon

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Justino de Neve (1625 – 1685) stood out (fig. 6): he was a friend, client and promoter of Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, and can be credited with having commissioned some of the painter's greatest achievements.⁹ One such example is Murillo's *Penitent Saint Peter* of 1685 (fig. 7). Given the striking compositional similarities between that work and the present canvas, it appears highly likely that the latter was known by the Spanish painter.

Our painting then descended in the collections of the Marqués de Moscoso for a number of generations, as evidenced by its reference in the remarkable Papal Indulgence granted to the V Marqués de Moscoso by the city's Archbishop in January 1774 (fig. 8). It remains in the possession of descendants of the family to this day.

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Figure 1. Anthony van Dyck, *Self-portrait at the age of fourteen*, 1613 – 1614.
Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna

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Figure 2. Peter Paul Rubens, *Daniel in the Lion's Den*, c. 1614 – 1616.
National Gallery of Art, Washington

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Figure 3. Anthony van Dyck, *Saint Jerome*, 1618 – 1620.
Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam

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Figure 4. Andalusian School, *Portrait of the I Marquesa de Moscoso, Luisa Francisca de Neve and Ramírez de Cartagena* (commissioned by her husband, Juan Arias de Saavedra, for the family portrait gallery in the Palacio de la Torre, Plaza de San Pedro, Seville), 17th century. Private collection

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Figure 5. Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, *Juan Arias de Saavedra*, 1650.
Collection of the Duchess of Cardona

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Figure 6. Bartolomé Estaban Murillo, *Portrait of Don Justino de Neve*, 1665.
National Gallery, London

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Figure 7. Bartolomé Estaban Murillo, *Penitent Saint Peter*, 1685.
Fundación Fondo de Cultura de Sevilla, Seville

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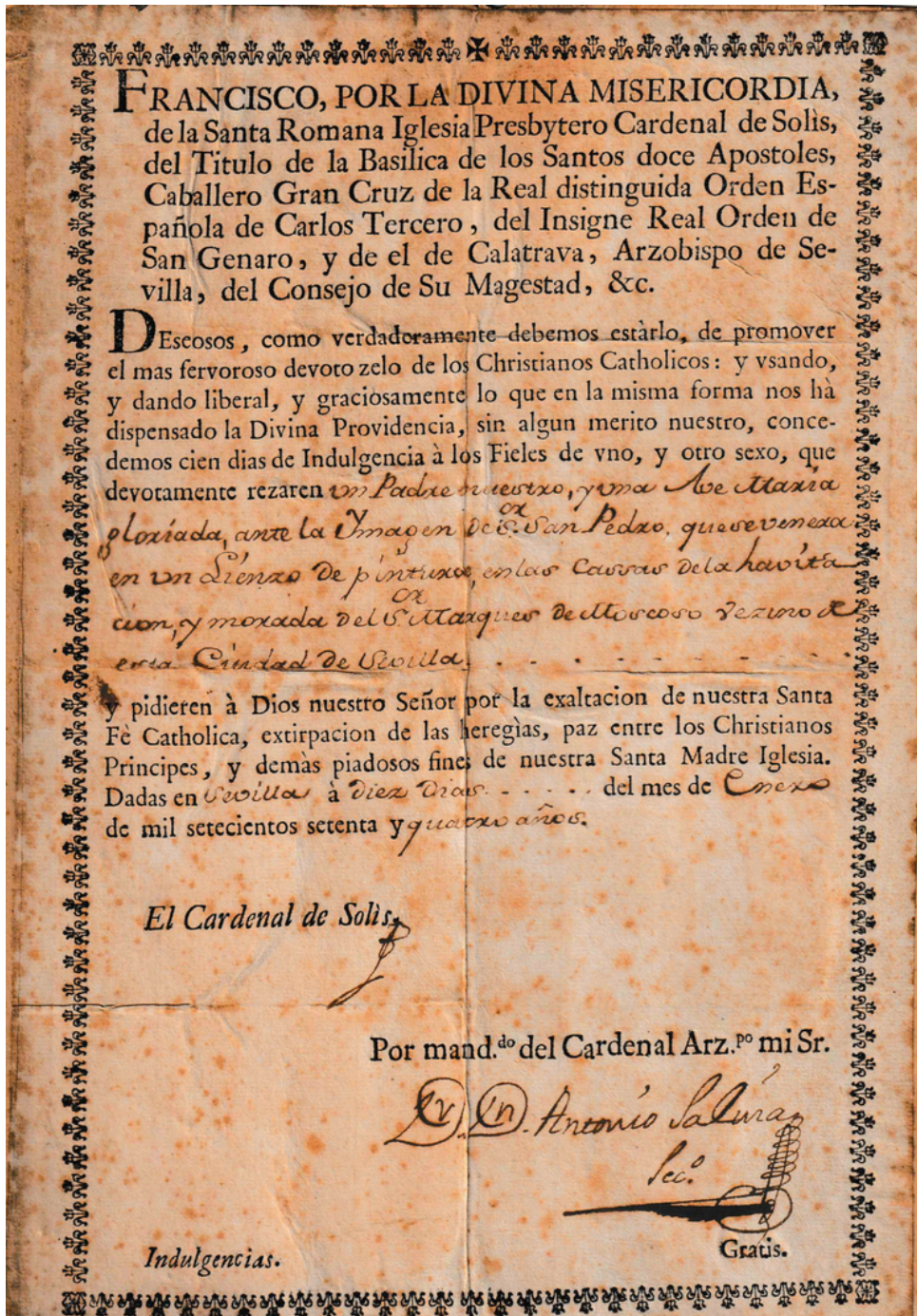


Figure 8. The Papal Indulgence granted to the V Marqués de Moscoso by the city's Archbishop in January 1774

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Footnotes

¹ See I. M. Melero Muñoz, 'Neve's *cursus honorum*: from merchants to Entailed estates. Linking of property and inheritance lawsuit (1743 – 1771)', *Studia Historica Historia Moderna*, 42 (1): 195, June 2020, pp. 200, 206, 208, 213:

https://gredos.usal.es/bitstream/handle/10366/143671/El_cursus_honorum_de_los_Neve_de_comerci.pdf;jsessionid=CCD645C9A60E47A854AA83B8AC623253?sequence=1

² P. F. Rombouts & T. Van Lierus, *De Liggeren en ander historische archiven der Antwerpsche Sint Lucasgilde*, The Hague 1872, vol. I, p. 545.

³ M. Rooses & C. Ruelens, *Codex diplomaticus Rubenianus. Correspondance de Rubens et documents épistolaires concernant sa vie et ses oeuvres*, Antwerp 1887 – 1909, vol. II (1898), p. 250.

⁴ A. Vergara & F. Lammertse, *The Young Van Dyck*, exh. cat., Madrid 2012, p. 27.

⁵ Another early *Saint Jerome* (c. 1615/16), quite different in compositional design to these two examples, can be found in the Liechtenstein Collection, Vienna: inv. no. GE 56.

⁶ G. Glück, 'Van Dyck Apostelfolge', in *Festschrift für Max J. Friedländer zum 60. Geburtstag*, Leipzig 1925 – 26, p. 261.

⁷ Melero Muñoz 2020, p. 200.

⁸ J. J. Rodríguez Mateos, 'Los Neve: Mercaderes, hidalgos y mecenas', *Los documentos del Archivo General de Andalucía*, April 2017, p. 46:

https://www.juntadeandalucia.es/cultura/archivos_html/sites/default/contenidos/archivos/aga/difusion/Colaboraciones/Documentos/NeveAH56.pdf

⁹ Rodríguez Mateos 2017, p. 46.