

# COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



Jacopo Bassano

(Bassano del Grappa, c. 1510 – 1592)

*Ecce Homo*

c. 1575

oil on slate

36 x 30 cm.; 14 ½ x 12 in.

inscribed in white, lower centre with  
the inventory number: +112+

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## Provenance

Diego Felipez de Guzmán, 1st Marqués of Leganés (1580-1655), probably acquired between 1635 and 1641 in Italy when the Marqués was Governor of the Duchy of Milan, and then transferred to his villa at Morata near Madrid; recorded in the posthumous inventory of the Marqués's estate in 1655: *un santo xpto pintado, al juizo de pilatos, en Piedra, de mano de basan, de una terzia de alto y poco más de ancho*.<sup>1</sup> Appraised at the same time in an inventory of the villa at Morata as follows: *una pintura de nuestro señor con la cana en la mano, y hay pintado uno perro con sum arco de eban y guarnicion dorada, no 307, en 600 ris* [i.e. valued at '600 ris [reales]';

By descent to Don Ventura Moscoso Osorio, 10<sup>th</sup> Conde de Altamira (listed in the 1753 inventory of his entailed property (*mayonago*), when it was said to be in the Oratory of the country villa at Morato, described as follows: *112. Obra pintura sobre piedra negra que es un Exzeomo, pintado por Basan, de media vara de ancho y poco más de alto;*

With Derek Johns, London, 1999;

Private Collection, Rome.

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(Possibly one of the paintings on slate from Bassano's *Passion of Christ* series seen and admired by Karel van Mander in the home of a Roman merchant between 1574 and early 1576.)

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## Literature

J. Lopez Navio, 'La gran colección de pinturas del Marques de Leganés' in *Analecta Calasanciana*, IV, 1962, 8, pp. 260-330: '*una pintura de nuestro señor con la cana en la mano, y hay pintado uno perro, con sum arco de ebano y gurnicion dorada, n. 307, en 600 ris [reales]*';

M. Agulló y Cobo, *Documentos para la historia de la pintura Española I*, Museo del Prado, Madrid 1994, p. 160;

M. Crawford Volk, 'New Light on a Seventeenth-Century Collector: The Marquis of Leganés', *The Art Bulletin*, LXII, 2, June 1980, pp. 256-268, p. 283: '*un santo xpto pintado, al juizo de pilatos, en Piedra, de mano de basan, de una terzia de alto y poco más de ancho*' and in the inventory of Lopez Navio: see pp. 326-327.

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## Comparative Literature

For more information on the Marqués de Leganes as a collector see F. Zeri, 'Il "Ratto d'Europa di Guido Reni e "Un gran personaggio in Ispagna', in *Diari di Lavoro 2*, Saggi 572, Turin 1976, pp. 112-122.

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This powerful and beautifully painted *Ecce Homo* by Jacopo Bassano was unknown to scholars until its rediscovery and authentication by Alessandro Ballarin in the late 1990s.<sup>3</sup> It belongs to a group of works painted on slate by the great Venetian sixteenth-century painter which are dateable to the mid-1570s and belonged to Don Felipe de Guzmán, Marqués de Leganés, who formed one of the most important art collections in seventeenth-century Spain, much of it during his time as Governor of Milan between 1635 and 1641.

Although relatively few paintings on slate by Bassano have come down to us, they were clearly much admired by his contemporaries. In 1577 they were singled out for praise by Lorenzo Marucini in a book celebrating the glories of the City of Bassano: 'This Master Giacomo dal Ponte is excellent in figure painting, divine as a painter of landscapes and the inventor of the true way of painting night scenes on the black stones of Verona'.<sup>4</sup> It is interesting that Bassano's night scenes on *pietre nere* should have been praised at the time in preference to his more typical pastoral genre scenes. Later, in 1604, in his life of Jacopo Bassano published in the famous *Schilder-Boeck*, the "Dutch Vasari" Karel van Mander recalled visiting a merchant's house while he was in Rome between 1574 and 1576 where he saw 'some small paintings of scenes of the Passion painted on black stone which gave the appearance of night. They were painted on small pieces of black stone on the surface of which rays of light from tapers, candles or oil lamps were traced over the black ground of the stone with streaks of gold and then varnished: there were to be seen the most graceful little figures, armed soldiers and other images and everywhere the ground was left in its natural state so that the black stone resembled night'.<sup>5</sup> This account shows that certainly by 1575 the night scenes of Jacopo Bassano were being admired by connoisseurs and that he was producing several small paintings of Christ's passion with gold highlights on dark *pietra nera* grounds which were much sought after and must have been circulating on the Italian art market.

According to Ballarin, however, the artist did not start producing these paintings much earlier than 1675, because the first indications of this line of development can be traced in two versions of a *Deposition* in Padua and Vicenza, the first of which is dated 1574. These are the same height as another comparable work - the *Baptism of Lucilla* which, although not

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dated, is believed by Ballarin to be not later than 1575. Also dateable to the same year are four other night scenes by Bassano: the *Annunciation to the Shepherds* in the National Gallery, Prague,<sup>6</sup> a *Nativity* in a private collection in Padua, an *Agony in the Garden* at Burghley House (fig. 1),<sup>7</sup> and lastly a beautiful nocturnal *Crucifixion* scene, also on black slate, which was rediscovered by Ballarin in the storeroom of the Museo de Arte de Catalüna, Barcelona, in 1988 (fig. 2),<sup>8</sup> and which provides the closest stylistic parallel with our painting.

In the centre of a burst of light radiating from a wall-mounted lamp, the figure of Pilate stands facing Jesus, dressed in a brilliant emerald green tunic painted with one of the rare mineral pigments so beloved of Bassano which are almost a signature of his work. The intense and rather chilly tonality of the green tunic and Pilate's turban painted in a vortex of white stand out in the centre of an inferno of reds, providing an extraordinarily dramatic and atmospheric effect. The way in which the light glances off the lines of the building combined with these colouristic effects is, according to Ballarin, one of the most beautiful inventions in Bassano's work during this period. The area around the figure of Christ is also a passage of great beauty with the Titianesque pinkish-red of his raiment spattered with blood spots from his flagellation and the touches of pure white which stand out from the surrounding gloom, the flickers of light, all of which create an effect of great power and pathos. Lastly the expressive figure of Christ himself, isolated against the surrounding darkness, the details of his bound arms and his crippled hands, the way in which the lines of the architecture are picked out with streaks of light, all show the inspiration of the late work of Titian and convey an emotional intensity which is also reminiscent of the work of El Greco. The figure of the dog in the lower left-hand corner of the painting, its head leading the eye up the staircase is also, according to Ballarin, one of the most beautiful and truthfully rendered examples in Bassano's work. The foreshortened figures of the boys, one of whom is dressed in a brilliant blue tunic, another signature motif of Bassano, provide a youthful and elegant foil to the figure of Pilate above with his Rembrandtesque head which, Ballarin suggests, almost has the air of a self-portrait. The young man who leans over from the right above the figures of the crouching boys is also a typical Bassano figure and the flashes of light, which play over

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the painting creating a multi-coloured firework display, are very comparable to those found in the Barcelona *Crucifixion* (see fig. 2).

No large-scale autograph versions by Jacopo Bassano of the present *Ecce Homo* composition are currently known although it is probable that some were made and that Bassano returned to the subject during the final decade of his life. It is very probable that in the same year that our picture must have been painted, 1575, Bassano may well have painted, also on slate, a nocturnal *Crowning with Thorns* as a pendant, because there is a good workshop version of this subject on the same support in the Galleria Sabauda in Turin,<sup>9</sup> and a painting on slate executed in the 1590s by Leandro Bassano deriving from the same composition and recorded in the eighteenth century in the Palace of Buen Retiro is now in the Prado, Madrid (fig. 3). The two original paintings on slate must have been very similar and may perhaps have been conceived as a pair because the Turin and Madrid versions of the *Crowning with Thorns* have a lamp fixed to the wall from which emanates a very similar burst of light as that seen in the *Ecce Homo*. The composition of the *Ecce Homo* was reprised by Jacopo's son Leandro during his years in Venice after 1595.<sup>10</sup> Several other examples of this subject attributable to Leandro Bassano have been recorded on the art market in London, Vienna and New York between 1937 and 1979.<sup>11</sup> There is a horizontal version of the composition (70 x 100 cm.) in a private collection and a preparatory study in red and black chalk on blue paper for another version of the same composition, also from the hand of Leandro Bassano, in the Hessisches Landesmuseum, Darmstadt.<sup>12</sup>

The rediscovery of this rare and important work in the 1990s and the reconstruction of its illustrious provenance made a very significant addition to the canon of the artist's work. Its recent reemergence onto the market from a private collection allows us to appreciate its superlative quality and to understand the high regard in which these nocturnal scenes painted on slate by Bassano were held, not only by the painter's artistic contemporaries, such as Karel van Mander, but also by the leading collectors of the day.

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## A note on the provenance:

Probably acquired in Italy between 1635 and 1641 by Don Diego Filipe de Guzmán, Marqués de Leganés when the Marqués was Governor of Milan, and then transferred to his country house at Morata near Madrid where there are two descriptions of paintings which appear to correspond. The inventory number 307 in these two inventories does not tally with the numbering given in the entries of the 1655 post-mortem inventories of the Leganés collection in their palace in Madrid or at Marata, but does correspond with the number and description given in the 1753 inventory of the entailed possessions of Leganes's descendant, the 10<sup>th</sup> Conde de the Altamira, where it was listed as in the Oratory at Marata. The form of the numbering painted in white and bracketed with two crosses is very similar to that found on some other paintings from the Leganés collection from Marata such as a Boltraffio, *Madonna and Child* (1655 inv. no. 728, National Gallery, London) in Lord Northwick's Collection in the nineteenth century which is numbered +103+, and which appears to be from the same series at Marata. This form of numbering is also found on a painting of *Spring* from a series of *Seasons* by the artist's son Leandro Bassano (1557-1622) sold by Sotheby's on 11<sup>th</sup> December 1996. Ballarin has suggested that it and the other paintings in that series of *Seasons*, together with the Boltraffio now in the National Gallery, may have emanated from the same Italian collection from which Leganes may have acquired our *Ecce Homo*. While this is certainly possible, it seems very likely that the white inventory numbers on these paintings relate to the 1753 Marata inventory.

Don Felipe de Guzmán, whose mother Leonora was the aunt of the extremely powerful Count-Duke Olivares and whose father was Gentleman of the Bedchamber to Phillip III, enjoyed a very successful career as a courtier, being appointed Philip IV's Gentleman of the Bedchamber and his first Knight and being created in 1627, first Marqués of Leganés. In 1630 he went into the service of his aunt Clara Eugenia, Governess of the Spanish Netherlands and, following her death in 1633, joined the household of her successor the Cardinal Infante don Fernando. From 1635 to 1641 he was himself appointed Governor of the Duchy of Milan. His career in Flanders and Italy gave him ample opportunity to build a collection which vied with that of Philip IV himself, which was distributed between the

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family's palace in the Calle de San Bernardo in Madrid and the country house in Morata.<sup>13</sup> The Leganés Collection descended through the Marqués's daughter, Ines Mesia de Guzmán who married don Gaspar de Moscoso y Mendoza, 5<sup>th</sup> Marquess of Almaza, via their son, the 7<sup>th</sup> Conde de Altamira to the 10<sup>th</sup> count whose collection was listed in the 1753 at Morata. Most of this collection was dispersed in the 1820s in a series of auctions held by Stanley's auction house in London between 1<sup>st</sup> June 1827 and the 24<sup>th</sup> March 1829, during a time following the Napoleonic wars when a large number of highly important Spanish paintings were being traded on the London art market. However, the fact that no paintings corresponding in description to our *Ecce Homo* were among those listed in these auctions and also that the painting resurfaced in the 1990s in an auction in Barcelona, suggests that the picture probably remained in Spain until the time of its rediscovery in the 1990s.

We are grateful to Alessandro Ballarin for his assistance in the cataloguing of this work. Professor Ballarin's written expertise, dated December 2008, is available upon request.



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**Figure 1.** Jacopo Bassano, *The Agony in the Garden*. Collection of the Marquess of Exeter, Burghley House, Stamford

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**Figure 2.** Jacopo Bassano, *The Crucifixion*, oil on slate, 1675. Museo de Arte de Catalüna, Barcelona

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**Figure 3.** Leandro Bassano after Jacopo Bassano, *The Crowning with Thorns*, 1590-98, oil on slate, 54 x 49 cm. Museo del Prado, Madrid

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## Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup> J. Lopez Navio, 'La gran colección de pinturas del Marques de Leganés' in *Analecta Calasanctiana*, IV, 1962, 8, pp. 260-330: 'una pintura de neuestro señor con la cana en la mano, y hay pintado uno perro, con sum arco de ebano y gurnicion dorada, n. 307, en 600 ris [reales].
- <sup>2</sup> M. Crawford Volk, 'New Light on a Seventeenth-Century Collector: The Marquis of Leganés', *The Art Bulletin*, LXII, 2, June 1980, pp. 256-268, p. 283: 'un santo xpto pintado, al juizo de pilatos, en Piedra, de mano de basan, de una terzia de alto y poco más de ancho' and in the inventory of Lopez Navio: see pp. 326-327.
- <sup>3</sup> Confirmed in expertise by Alessandro Ballarin, Padua, December 2008.
- <sup>4</sup> L. Marucini, *Il Bassano*, published with a dedication to the Doge, Venice, 1<sup>st</sup> August 1577, pp. 59-60.
- <sup>5</sup> K. van Mander, 'Life of Jacopo Bassano', *Het Schilderboek*, Haarlem 1604, fol 180. For a discussion of Van Mander's 'Life of Bassano' and its Italian translations and of Marucini's eulogy cited above, see A. Ballarin, 'La vecchiaia di Jacopo Bassano: le fonte e la critica (Nota introduttiva alla "Chirurgia bassanesca" con, in appendice, la ristampa dell'elogio del Marucini e la traduzione italiana della "Vita" del Van Mander' in *Atti dell'istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti*, 1966-7, CCV, pp. 151-193, republished in A. Ballarin, *Jacopo Bassano, Scritti 1964-1995*, (ed.) V. Romani, Padua 1995, I, pp. 37-68.
- <sup>6</sup> A. Ballarin, *Jacopo Bassano, Scritti 1964-1995*, (ed.) V. Romani, Padua 1995, I, fig. 135.
- <sup>7</sup> A. Ballarin, *Jacopo Bassano, Scritti 1964-1995*, (ed.) V. Romani, Padua 1995, I, fig. 136.
- <sup>8</sup> A. Ballarin, *Jacopo Bassano, Scritti 1964-1995*, (ed.) V. Romani, Padua 1995, I, fig. 140.
- <sup>9</sup> Detail of the Turin version illustrated in A. Ballarin, *Jacopo Bassano, Scritti 1964-1995*, (ed.) V. Romani, Padua 1995, fig. 139.
- <sup>10</sup> As can be seen in a much larger painting (103.5 x 76 cm.) auctioned by Christie's in Rome (10<sup>th</sup> May 1983, lot 238) as attributed to Jacopo Bassano.
- <sup>11</sup> London, Botenweiser Gallery, 1937 recorded by Hans and Erica Tietze Conrat as signed by Leandro Bassano (*The Drawings of the Venetian Painters*, New York 1944, no. 224., p. 57); Vienna, Dorotheum, 27<sup>th</sup> November 1945, lot 5, illustrated as by Leandro; Kende, New York, Brooks Sale, 17<sup>th</sup> April 1948, lot 87; Sotheby's, 19<sup>th</sup> September 1973, lot 169, as School of Leandro; London, Sotheby's, 28<sup>th</sup> March 1979, lot 237.
- <sup>12</sup> Inv AE 1427 (Tietze, *Jacopo Bassano*, 1944, no. 129, p. 50) who, at that time wrote that 'no painting of this composition is preserved'.
- <sup>13</sup> J. Lopez Navio, 'La gran colección de pinturas del Marques de Leganés' in *Analecta Calasanctiana*, IV, 1962, 8, pp. 326-327.