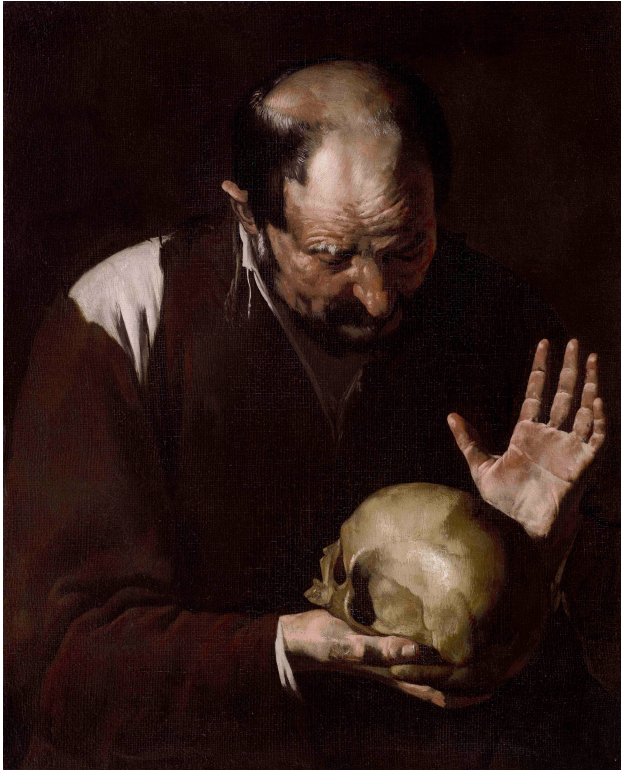


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Master of the Annunciation
to the Shepherds
(Játiva 1604 – 1654 Naples)

Stoic Thinker

oil on canvas
71 x 58 cm.;
30 x 22 ¾ in.

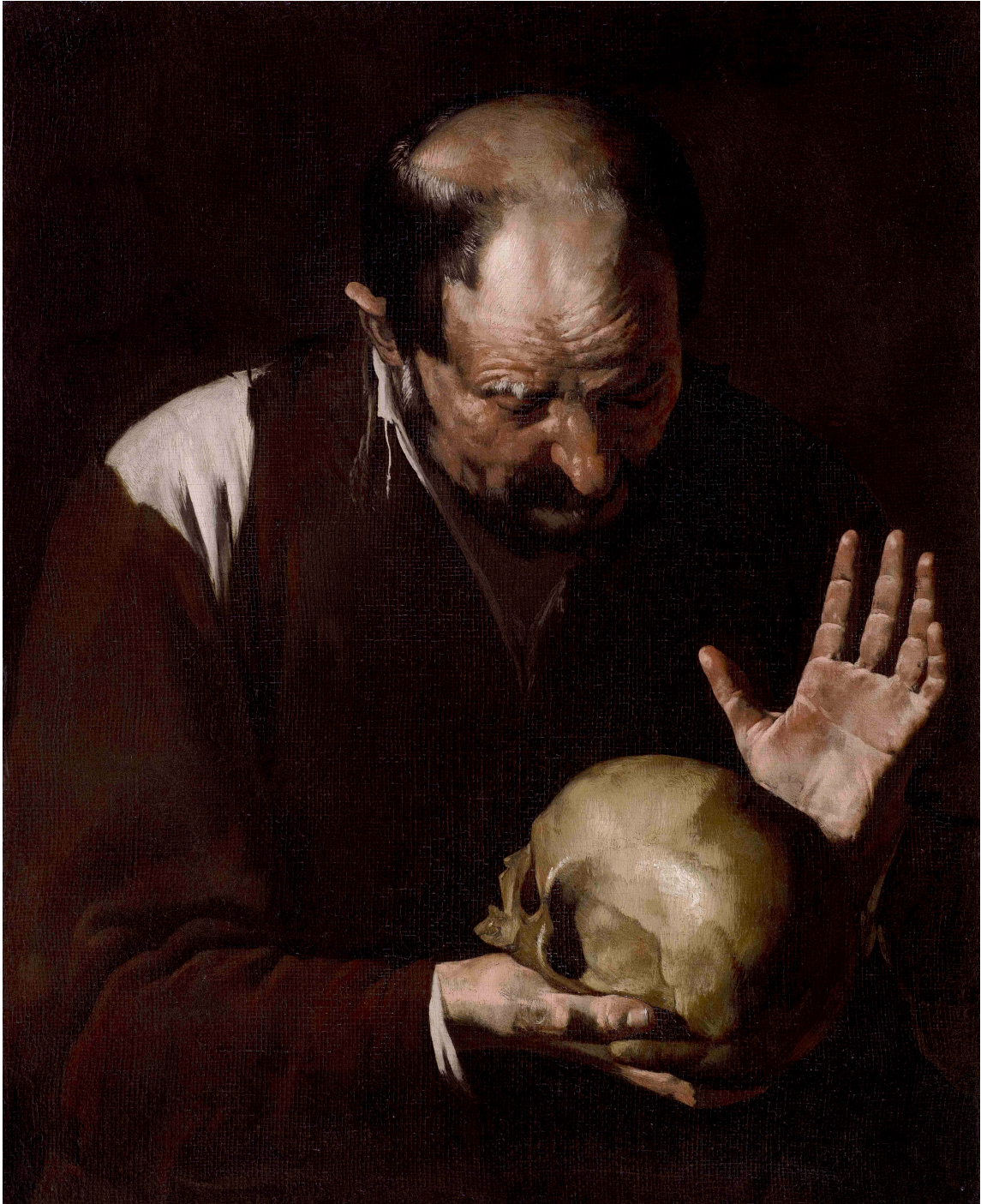
Literature

G. De Vito, 'Juan Do reconfirmed', in *Studies on Naples in the 1600s*, 2003-2004, p. 89, collection III; p. 91;

N. Spinosa in *Ritorno al Barocco*, exh. cat., vol. I, Naples 2009, p. 101, n. 1.30.

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The present painting was first noticed by Giuseppe De Vito, who was also responsible for identifying – though not yet unanimously accepted, it is sufficiently credible for this writer – the anonymous Master of the Annunciation to the Shepherds as Juan Do (or Dò, or Dose), born in Játiva in 1604 and deceased in Naples, presumably in 1656.¹ The body of work attributed to the Master of the Annunciation to the Shepherds was collated for the first time by F. Bologna.² This name is taken from *The Annunciation to the Shepherds* (fig. 1), found today in the Birmingham Art Gallery, the attribution of which was long disputed between Diego Velázquez and Jusepe de Ribera; identification then moved towards the circle of the latter, initially Bartolomeo Bassante (or, sometimes, Passante), and finally to Do, after De Vito's discovery of an acronym on *The Philosopher Reading*, which appeared at Christie's New York in 1999 (fig. 2).³

This attribution of the painting was confirmed by Nicola Spinosa, who proposed dating it to the end of the 1640s; he also disagreed with the hypothesis put forward by De Vito – backed by weak but still noteworthy arguments – that Do may have been of Jewish origin. In fact, the writer had already pointed out years before that Do, most likely born in Valencia in Spain around 1604, had almost certainly spent his childhood and early adolescence there. Little is known about his life and his artistic activities. Admitted in 1616 to the Colegio de pintores de Valencia, his name was there recorded as 'Juan Dose';⁴ as a student, he had to pay a supplemental tuition fee '*for ser de reyne strany*' designed for students with foreign backgrounds, perhaps because he was the son of a French stonemason. Within this school-collective environment, the painter Jeronimo de Espinosa was entrusted with his training.⁵

On May 3 1626, Juan Do married Grazia De Rosa, sister of the painter Giovan Francesco (known as Pacecco), in Naples; records state that he was 22 at the time, and had resided in Naples for three years (since approximately 1623). Considered 'Spanish' on this occasion, it is said that Filippo Vitale spoke at the wedding, while Giovanni Battista Caracciolo and Jusepe de Ribera, known as the Spagnoletto, were chosen as witnesses: it is clear then that, by this date, he was fully integrated into the society of Neapolitan painters.⁶

In fact, this painting, like a significant number of others with similar themes, reveals a painter whose figurative culture can be easily placed alongside that of Jusepe de Ribera. In the first half of the 1630s, the latter produced a series of idealised portraits of the philosophers and poets of classical antiquity; his preference was for historic and mythological figures of poets, and stoic and cynical philosophers, but he also painted portraits of Plato, Archimedes, Anassimandro, Pythagoras, Aesop, among others. This aspect of Ribera's output has been traced to a neo-Stoic and neo-Cynical philosophical trend that seems to have been widespread in Neapolitan culture, which, in turn, would have led to artists furnishing the libraries of many scholars with images of those figures deemed to be perennial examples of morality and intellectual stature.⁷

The first difference between Ribera and Juan Do is that, while the former shows his characters both in profile and facing the viewer – as in the famous *Democritus*, found in the Prado Museum in Madrid, signed and dated to 1630 (fig. 3) – Do seems to consistently represent his own as ignoring him; so intent are they on intense meditation that they cannot tolerate the distraction (fig. 2).

According to De Vito, the present painting depicts 'an ordinary person, one of the shepherds depicted in the Nativity, amazed, surprised rather than pensive, as he regards the symbol that signifies the omega of the alphabet of earthly life'. It is the same amazement felt before the birth, at the other extreme of the spectrum: a pious and devoted amazement expressed through tender interest.⁸

It should be noted, in terms of these assertions, that the character's ragged clothes are almost the uniform of the Stoic philosopher, who rejected any kind of dependence on material things. Ribera himself adopted this iconographic convention regularly to portray characters that were not saints or effigy, while Juan Do has done the same in various images of this type.

Therefore, there is no visible reason to assume that the man depicted in the painting discussed here, captured in a pose of tormented interaction with the skull, has to be an

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‘ordinary person’. Do's radical realism (in which the entirety of the power and intrigue of his figurative discourse is found) means that he probably used people within his domestic or social circles as a model: indeed, many of these features recur in more than one of his paintings. This is not the place to get to the bottom of this argument; if, however, it is true that Do has drawn from sensory experiences to make credible, but idealised, images of historic figures, known through only a handful of texts, there can be no doubt that the only reason why we cannot credibly label most of these works is the lack of method and information with which the issue has been confronted.

It is no coincidence that, in what is considered by many to be his allegorical self-portrait (fig. 4), Do depicts the same character found in this painting as in *The Philosopher Reading* (fig. 2, believed by some writers to be the painter's father). The painter's method, therefore, is clear: he takes a model from real life and adapts it to the subject that he wishes to portray, transforming it – and idealising it – from time to time, depending on his needs.

An observation remains to be made about some of the stylistic features of the painting discussed here: the use of vermilion in the mixture of the complexion, and, as a result, the creation of greater luminosity in these sections of the painting, shows an employment of technical solutions to give a tanned effect to the man's skin. Bearing in mind that a small pendant exists in the Gualtieri–De Biase collection in Naples, in which there is a depiction of *The Annunciation to the Shepherds* now attributed to Do, and another half attributed to Bernardo Cavallino (a master born in 1616, and therefore considerably younger than Do, who consistently highlighted the skin of his characters by using vermilion or other lacquers), it is necessary perhaps to propose a date for this painting in the second half of the 1630s, or perhaps even 1640. This would explain the accentuated brightness of the image, aligning not only with contributions made by Cavallino to the Neapolitan art scene, but also with the same neo-Venetian turn made by Ribera, whose path remained a constant point of reference for all that we know about Juan Do.

Riccardo Lattuada

Rome, 28 February 2014

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Figure 1. Master of the Annunciation to the Shepherds, *The Annunciation to the Shepherds*, 1600 – 1650. Birmingham Art Gallery, UK

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Figure 2. Master of the Annunciation to the Shepherds, *The Philosopher Reading*.
Private collection

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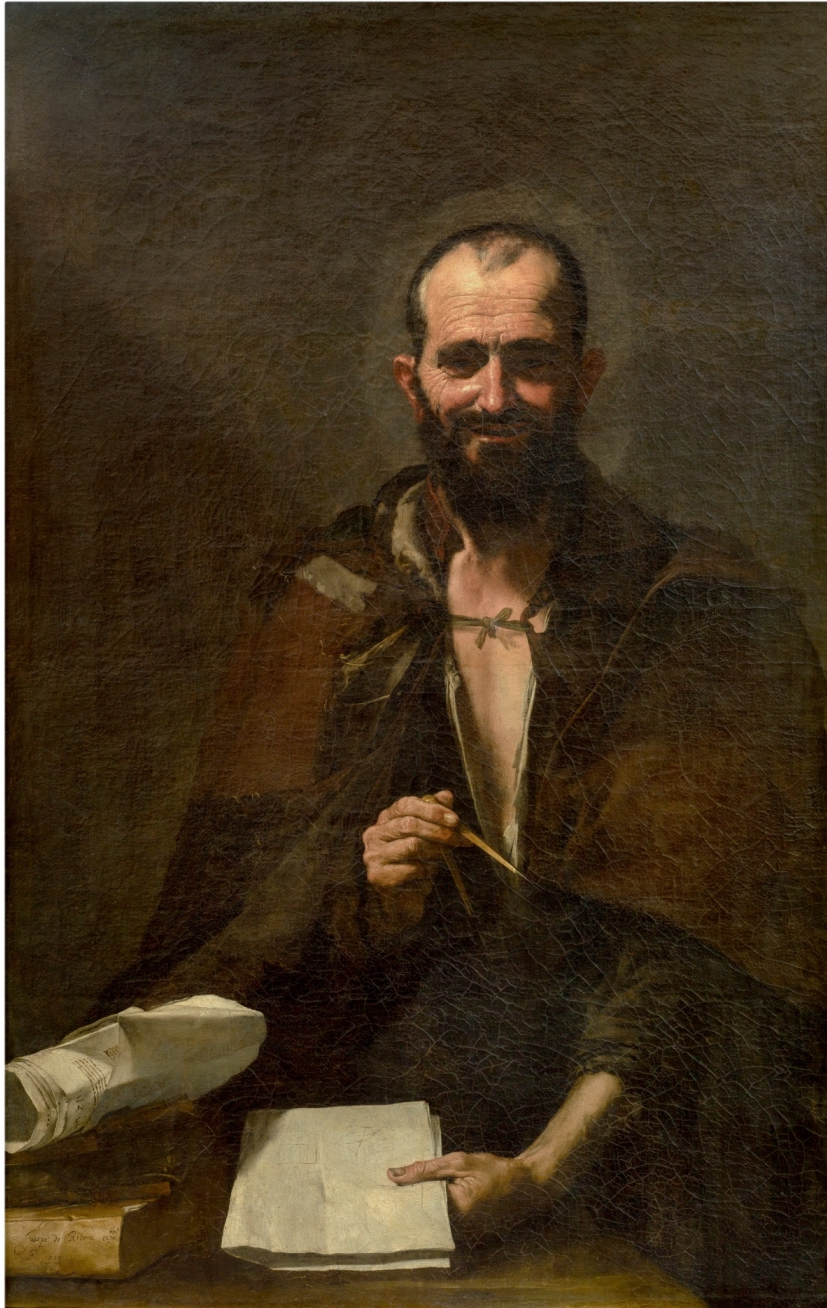


Figure 3. Jusepe de Ribera, *Democritus*, 1630.
Museo del Prado, Madrid

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Figure 4. Master of the Annunciation to the Shepherds, *The Painter's Studio*.
Private collection

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Footnotes

¹ G. De Vito, 'Changes in naming the Master of the Annunciation to the Shepherds', in *Studies on Naples in the 1600s*, 1996-1997, pp. 7-62.

² *Works of art in Salerno from the fifteenth to the seventeenth century*, exh. cat., Salerno 1955, p. 55, note 1, on the basis of a contribution by Roberto Longhi of 1935.

³ 29 January 1999, lot 127. Ascribed to the Master of the Annunciation by the writer on the basis of photographs which did not appear in the catalogue because of a misprint.

⁴ D. L. Tramoyeres Blasco, 'At the School for Painters in Valencia' in *Archive of Historical Research*, II, 1911, 6, p. 521.

⁵ A. E. Pérez Sanchez, *Pittura napoletana: de Caravaggio a Giordano*, exh. cat., Madrid 1985, p.120 and ff.

⁶ For a biographical entry of existing documentation, see R. Lattuada, entry 'DO (Dose), Juan (Giovanni)' in the *Dizionario bibliografica degli italiani*, Volume 40, Rome 1991.

⁷ See O. Ferrari, 'L'iconografia dei filosofi antichi nella pittura del sec. XVII in Italia' in *Storia dell'arte*, n.57, 1986, pp. 103-181.

⁸ See G. De Vito, 'Juan Do reconfirmed', in *Studies on Naples in the 1600s*, 2003-2004, p. 89, collection III; p. 91.