

A detailed oil painting of a man's face and upper torso. The man has dark, thick eyebrows, dark eyes looking slightly to the right, a straight nose, and a full, dark beard and mustache. He is wearing an ornate, dark garment with intricate white embroidery or lacework visible on the collar and shoulders. The background is a neutral, light brownish-tan color.

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Circle of Juan Pantoja de la Cruz *Portrait of a Spanish
Courtier, c. 1595-1605*

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Circle of JUAN PANTOJA DE LA CRUZ

(Madrid 1551 – 1608)

PORTRAIT OF A SPANISH COURTIER, c. 1595-1605

oil on canvas

48 x 38.5 cm; 18 7/8 x 15 1/8 in.

Provenance

Collection of Nicolás Gato de Lema (1820-1883), Madrid until his death;
Private collection.

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We are thankful to Professor Almudena Pérez de Tudela for having endorsed the attribution of the present painting to the immediate circle of Pantoja de la Cruz (1551-1608).

This bust-length portrait of a Spanish gentleman displays the hallmarks of late 16th-century Habsburg court portraiture, warranting its attribution to the circle of Juan Pantoja de la Cruz, the most famous court portraitist during the reign of Philip III. The painting's meticulous fidelity to materials and texture, from the delicate rendering of the lace ruff and the black silk doublet to the modelling of flesh tones, is entirely consistent with Pantoja's mature technique and that of his immediate milieu. In all his output Pantoja made use of a large workshop of assistants who later took over his activities. Of these, the most important were Bartolomé González (1564- 1627) and Rodrigo de Villandrando (c. 1588-1622).

In this portrait, the intricate *lechuguilla* collar (so-called for its lettuce-like layers) and the rich black attire closely match the careful brushwork seen in Pantoja's signed works, as the *Portrait of Don Diego Gómez de Sandoval y Rojas* (c. 1598, Norton Simon Museum, Fig. 1). The restrained, frontal pose against a dark ground and the pale complexion with a refined reddish blush on the cheeks are other features characteristic of Pantoja's portraits.¹ In the manner that had been used in Spanish portraiture since Antonio Moro and later Sánchez Coello, Pantoja manages to reflect the severe character of the subject, whose gaze is both firm and restless and of great expressive intensity. A gentle light falls from the upper left, causing the pale face and white collar to gleam against the subdued backdrop. Another comparable example, similar in compositional cut and technique, is the *Portrait of a Knight of the Order of Santiago* (1601) now at the Prado Museum (Fig. 2).

In terms of dating, the sitter's costume and grooming conventions clearly point to the turn of the 17th century. His black silk doublet and enveloping cloak are directly reminiscent of those worn earlier on by King Philip II (Fig. 3). The monochrome costume is relieved only by its contrasting adornments. Foremost is the splendid, starched ruff encircling the sitter's neck: this type of large lace collar reached exaggerated width during the final years of the 1500s and the early 1600s. Over the course of Philip III's reign (1598–1621), ruff collars grew so large that they required internal supports. The example seen here accords with that peak of the ruff's popularity, before the style began to wane after circa 1610-1620. The gentleman's facial hair and hairstyle suggest a similar dating: the trimmed moustache with the ends slightly upturned and a pointed chin beard were indeed fashionable among

¹ See F. Montesinos, "Portrait of a Young Nobleman: a Knight of the Order of Calatrava", *Collections In Focus / National Palaces*, Sintra Queluz Pena 2017.

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Spanish nobility around 1600, as contemporary portraits of Philip III and his courtiers often show this distinctive arrangement (Fig. 4). The sitter's hair is cut relatively short, consistent with male coiffures of the period, since longer hairstyles would not become common until later in the 17th century.

Note on provenance

Nicolás Gato de Lema (1820-1883) was a Madrid-born painter, academic, conservator and collector. He was trained by José de Madrazo and he was among the favoured pupils of Vicente López Portaña, who portrayed him wearing the insignia of the Order of Carlos III (Fig. 5). Gato de Lema first came to notice as a landscape painter, exhibiting views at the Exposition Universelle, Paris, in 1855 and, the following year, at the Madrid Exposición Nacional de Bellas Artes. In 1859 he was elected Academician of the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando. He remained active in institutional life, thereafter, serving in 1878 as an Academy delegate on the Rome Prize jury for history painting.²

Gato de Lema also pursued a parallel career as a restorer and connoisseur. He published on restoration and undertook significant interventions on works by Ribera, Murillo, and others, including paintings at El Escorial. In 1864 he was appointed *primer restaurador de cámara* to Queen Isabel II, a role that placed him at the heart of royal collection care; he also supplied landscape paintings to the King-Consort, Francisco de Asís de Borbón. His standing in scholarly circles is reflected in memberships of learned societies (including the Institut de l'Afrique and the Sociedad Arqueológica e Histórica de la Charente), contributions as illustrator and writer to the *Museo Español de Antigüedades*, and authorship of the explanatory text for the Academy's *Cuadros Selectos* engraving after El Greco's *Entierro del Señor de Orgaz* (1872). As a collector, Gato de Lema assembled an eclectic cabinet, made of archaeological and decorative objects, a notable numismatic collection and a substantial *iconoteca* of historic personages - at least 37 paintings and 20 miniatures depicting Spanish monarchs (e.g. Isabella I la Católica, Felipe V, Carlos II) and renowned artists and writers (such as Francisco de Quevedo and Diego Velázquez).³

² M. Ossorio y Bernard, *Galería biográfica de artistas españoles del siglo XIX*, Madrid 1868, vol. I, p. 278.

³ Pedro J. Martínez Plaza, *El retrato en el coleccionismo burgués y nobiliario en Madrid durante el siglo XIX*, Madrid, Escuela de Arte y Antigüedades 2021.

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Fig. 1. Pantoja de la Cruz, *Portrait of Diego Gómez de Sandoval y Rojas, Count of Saldaña*, c. 1598, oil on canvas. Pasadena, Norton Simon Museum.

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Fig. 2. Pantoja de la Cruz, *Portrait of a Knight of the Order of Santiago*, 1601, oil on canvas. Madrid, Prado Museum.

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Fig. 3. Sofonisba Anguissola, *Portrait of Philip II of Spain*, oil on canvas. Madrid, Museo del Prado.



Fig. 4. Pantoja de la Cruz, *Portrait of King Philip*, c. 1603, oil on canvas. Royal Palace of Madrid.



Fig. 5. Vicente López Portaño, *Portrait of Nicolás Gato de Lema*, c. 1842-1844, oil on canvas. Madrid, Museo Lázaro Galdiano

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