

El Greco (Domenikos Theotokopoulos), 1541-1614
Laocoön

**KRESS CATALOGUE NUMBER**

K1413

IDENTIFIER

1223

ARTIST

El Greco (Domenikos Theotokopoulos), 1541-1614

NATIONALITY

Greek

DATE

c. 1610/1614

MEDIUM

oil on canvas

TYPE OF OBJECT

Painting

DIMENSIONS

137.5 x 172.5 cm (54 1/8 x 67 15/16 in)

LOCATION

National Gallery of Art, Washington, District of Columbia

PROVENANCE

Probably in El Greco's possession at his death; [1] his son Jorge Manuel Theotócopuli, Toledo, in 1621. [2] The Infante Antonio María Felipe Luis de Orleáns, Duque de Montpensier [1824-1890], Seville; [3] by inheritance to his son, the Infante Don Antonio de Orleáns, Duque de Galliera, Sanlúcar de Barremada, Cádiz. [4] (Durand-Ruel, Paris) by 1910. [5] (Paul Cassirer, Berlin), by October 1915. [6] The pianist Edwin Fischer [1886-1960], Basel and Berlin, by 1923; [7] Eleanora Irme von Jeszenski von Mendelssohn, Berlin, who was divorced from Fischer in 1925, by 1926. [8] T.R.H. Prince and Princess Paul of Yugoslavia, Belgrade, Johannesburg, and Paris, by May 1934; [9] consigned 1946 by Prince Paul to (M. Knoedler and Co., London, Paris, and New York); sold February 1946 to the Samuel H. Kress Foundation, New York; [10] gift 1946 to NGA. [1] The inventory made of the artist's estate in 1614 included two examples of "a small Laocoön" ("Un laocoon pequeño") and one large painting of this subject ("Un laocoon grande"). Francisco de Borja de San Román y Fernández, *El Greco en Toledo* (Madrid, 1910): 193. Because the measurements of the Kress painting correspond most closely to those of the smallest of the versions cited in the inventory of 1621 (see n. 2 below), it seems likely that the Kress painting was one of the two small versions recorded in 1614. [2] The inventory made of the possessions of Jorge Manuel in 1621 includes the following items: "41 Un laocoon, de dos varas de largo y vara y dos terzias de alto" ("A Laocoön of two *varas* in width and one and two-thirds of a *vara* in height"). "179 Un laocoon grande, de tres varas y media en quadrado" ("A large Laocoön, three and one-half *varas* square"). "180 Otro laocoon, casi del mismo Tamaño" ("Another

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Laocoön, almost the same size"). Francisco de Borja de San Román y Fernández, "De la vida del Greco," *Archivo Español de Arte y Arqueología* 3 (1927), 291, 301. Because a vara equals approximately 84 cm., the measurements of no. 41 correspond closely to those of the Kress painting. The difference in the numbers of large and small versions of the subject mentioned in the two inventories suggest that Jorge Manuel sold one of the two smaller paintings in his father's estate and that he or another artist in the workshop produced another large copy of the composition before 1621. Alternatively, a mistake may have been made in one of the inventories. Many previous scholars have maintained that the Kress painting was in the Spanish royal collection in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Manuel B. Cossío, *El Greco* (Madrid, 1908), 362; Emilio H. del Villar, *El Greco en España* (Madrid, 1928), 132; Walter S. Cook, "El Greco's Laocoön in the National Gallery," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 26 (1944), 262, n. 1; José Camón Aznar, *Domenico Greco* (Madrid, 1950) 2: 921; Harold E. Wethey, *El Greco and His School* (Princeton, 1962) 2: 84, no. 127; Colin Eisler, *Paintings from the Samuel H. Kress Collection: European Schools Excluding Italian* (Oxford, 1977), 198, no. K1413; William B. Jordan, *El Greco of Toledo [exh. cat.] (1982-1983)*, 257, no. 56. However, it is likely that the royal inventories refer not to the Kress painting but to one of the larger versions cited in the 1621 inventory (nos. 179 and 180). The relevant entries are as follows: Alcázar, Madrid, Inventory of 1666, no. 520: "3 varas casi en quadro de Lauconte y sus hijos de mano del Greco en 300 dicadps de plata" ("3 varas, almost square, of Laocoön and his sons, by the hand of El Greco, at 300 silver ducados"). Harold E. Wethey, letter, 22 June 1969, NGA curatorial files. Alcázar, Madrid, Inventory of 1686, no. 310: "Un quadro de tres baras de largo casi cuadrado de la Oconte y sus hijos de blanco y negro de mano del Griego, tiene Marco negro como las demas pinturas de esta pieza" ("A painting, three varas in width, almost square, of Laocoön and his sons, in white and black by the hand of El Greco, has a black frame like the other paintings in this room"). Yves Bottineau, "L'Alcázar de Madrid et l'inventaire de 1686: aspects de la cour d'Espagne au XVIIe siècle," *Bulletin Hispanique* 60 (1958), 164. Alcázar, Madrid, Inventory of 1701-1703, no. 119: "Un cuadro de tres varas de largo quasi cuadrado de laoconte y sus hijos de blanco y negro de mano del Griego con marco negro tasado en cien Doblons" ("A painting three varas in width, almost square, of Laocoön and his sons, in white and black by the hand of El Greco, with a black frame valued at 100 doblones"). Gloria Fernández Bayton, ed., *Inventarios reales: Testamento del Rey Carlos II*, 6 vols. (Madrid, 1975-), 1:29. The dimensions given in all these inventories correspond to the now lost larger versions of the Laocoön but not to the Kress painting. The dimensions given in all these inventories correspond to the now lost larger versions of the Laocoön but not to the Kress painting. The Kress painting has also been related to references in the royal inventories of 1701-1703 and 1791 to an approximately square painting of Laocoön, about two varas across, said to be a copy of Titian. The width of this painting approximates that of the Kress painting. However, it seems most unlikely that the Kress painting would have been described as a copy of Titian, especially because an original Laocoön by El Greco and the copy after Titian were recorded in the royal collections at the same time (Fernández Bayton 1975-, 1:29, no. 119; 2:324, no. 581). Spanish critics of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries carefully distinguished the styles of Titian and El Greco, and the compilers of the royal inventories probably would not have confused them. See, e. g. Antonio Palomino de Castro y Velasco, *El Museo pictórico y escala óptica (1715 and 1724, reprint ed., Madrid, 1947)*, 841; and Antonio Ponz, *Viaje de España*, ed. C. María de Rivero (Madrid, 1947), 640. [3] *Catalogo de los cuadros y esculturas pertenecientes á la galeria de SS. AA. RR. los Serenísimos Señores Infantes de España*, Duques de Montpensier (Seville, 1866), 44, no. 155. [4] Manuel B. Cossío, *El Greco* (Madrid, 1908), 579, no. 162. [5] Colin Eisler, 1977 (see n. 2 above), 198, 201, n. 163, no. K1413. On loan to the Alte Pinakothek, Munich, July 1911-1913. The ownership of the painting from 1911 to October 1915 is uncertain. [6] Ludwig Burchard, "Werke alter Kunst aus Berliner Privatbesitzer," *Kunst und Künstler* 13 (1915), 525. Recorded in 1914 and again in 1915 as on loan to the Kaiser Friedrich Museum, Berlin. [7] "Die Zeit und der Markt: Sammlungen," *Der Cicerone* 15 (1923), 1156-1157; H. U. Schmid, "Über das Jahr 1923," *Jahresbericht der öffentlichen Kunstsammlungen, Basel* 20 (1923), 6; H. U. Schmid, *Über das Jahr 1924: Gemäldegalerie*, *Jahresbericht der öffentlichen Kunstsammlungen, Basel* 21 (1924), 6. [8] R. Riggensbach, "Über das Jahr 1926: Gemäldegalerie," *Jahresbericht der öffentlichen Kunstsammlungen, Basel* 23 (1926), 27; Otto Fischer, "Bericht über das Jahr 1928: Gemäldegalerie," *Jahresbericht der öffentlichen Kunstsammlungen, Basel* (1928), 6; Otto Fischer, "Bericht über das Jahr 1929," *Jahresbericht der öffentlichen Kunstsammlungen, Basel* (1929), 34. Basic biographical information about Fischer and Von Jeszenski von Mendelssohn is given in *Neue Deutsche Biographie* 5 (Munich, 1961), 180. Walter S. Cook, "El Greco's Laocoön in the National Gallery," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 26 (1944), 262, n. 1 maintains that the Laocoön was purchased before 1914 by Fischer's wife, whom he misidentifies as Frau von Schwabach. Because this painting was owned by the dealer Cassirer in 1915, this supposition is unlikely. However, the painting may have been purchased by ischer's wife before their marriage in 1919. Frau von Schwabach may possibly have been an earlier owner, unrelated to Fischer. [9] Kenneth Clark, "Report: National Gallery, 1935," *National Gallery and Tate Gallery Directors' Reports 1935* (London, 1935), 4. On loan to the National Gallery, London, May 1934-December 1935. During the Second World War, Prince Paul, then resident in Johannesburg, arranged to have the painting at the National Gallery, Washington, for safekeeping (David Edward Finley, *A Standard of Excellence: Andrew W. Mellon Found the National Gallery of Art at Washington*, [Washington, DC, 1973], 89). [10] John Walker, *Self Portrait with Donors* (Boston, 1974), 144-146, presents a lively discussion of the negotiations involved in the sale. See also Knoedler Sales book no.16, Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

ACCESSION NUMBER

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LEGACY NGA NUMBER

885

1 ACQUISITION

M. Knoedler & Co., February 1, 1946

2 DISTRIBUTIONS

Loan to National Gallery of Art, February 12, 1946

Gift to National Gallery of Art, August 01, 1946

EXTERNAL LINKS

Related Collection Record

<https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.33253.html>

Related National Gallery of Art Library Image Collections Record

https://library.nga.gov/permalink/01NGA_INST/1p5jvkq/alma99231673804896

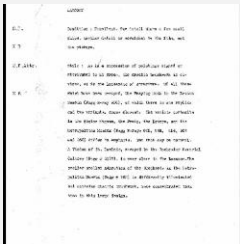
Related National Gallery of Art Systematic Catalog

<https://www.nga.gov/content/dam/ngaweb/research/publications/pdfs/spanish-painting-15th-19th-centuries.pdf>

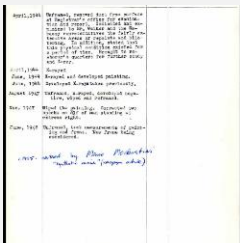
6 ARCHIVAL ITEMS



K1413 - Art object record, circa 1930s-1950s

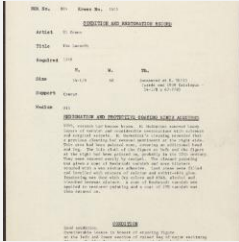


K1413 - Alan Burroughs report, circa 1930s-1940s

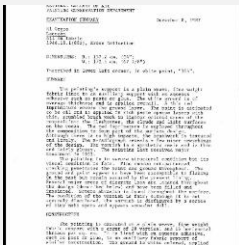


K1413 - Work summary log, 1944-1955

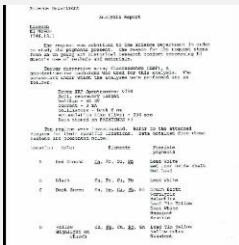
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K1413 - Condition and restoration record, circa 1950s-1960s



K1413 - Examination summary, 1987



K1413 - Scientific analysis report, 1987

RECORD LINK

<https://kress.nga.gov/Detail/objects/1223>