



Taschen
EL GRECO

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EL GRECO

Domenico Theotocopoulos, meglio conosciuto come El Greco nacque a Creta nel 1545 e studiò a Venezia con Tiziano prima di stabilirsi a Toledo. La Chiesa e la nobiltà locale gli commissionarono numerose opere a carattere religioso che egli realizzò con il suo stile drammatico caratterizzato da figure contorte e colori vibranti a contrasto con il grigio più tenue. Sebbene sia stato un artista apprezzato anche dai suoi contemporanei è stato il ventesimo secolo ad eleggerlo maestro e a subirne una profonda influenza.

#arte



In Search of Work in Rome and Spain

El Greco's presence in Rome in 1570 is evidenced by a letter by Giulio Clovio (1498–1578), a Croatian painter of miniatures, in which Clovio recommends to his patron, Alessandro Farnese, a "giovane Candiotto discepolo di Titiano" ("a young man from Candia, a disciple of Titian"). Adding a reference to a sadly lost self-portrait, which reputedly astonished all the painters in Rome, Clovio asks protection for El Greco and the provision of lodging for him at the Palazzo Farnese.

Perhaps as thanks, El Greco painted a portrait of his friend Clovio, the earliest surviving portrait from the Cretan artist's hand (ill. p. 19). The sitter is depicted holding his most famous work, the *Farnese Book of Hours* which he illustrated for Alessandro Farnese in 1546.

The originality of El Greco's pictorial ideas at this early date is reflected in a subject of which various versions, including copies, exist: *A Boy blowing on an Ember to light a Candle (El soplón)*. One of these works, surviving in the Farnese Collections, may have been directly commissioned by the Duke (ill. p. 18). The subject was very probably a paraphrase of a classical model, but also had several predecessors in Venetian painting. Yet there the depictions tended to be marginal episodes in a larger narrative context, as with Titian or Jacopo Bassano, whose work had a large audience at that period. El Greco's achievement, in other words, consisted in isolating an individual figure and bringing it into close proximity with the viewer by means of the lighting and the low vantage point, known as *sotto in situ*.

Actually there was very little to do for El Greco in the Farnese household, which chiefly required fresco painters. Although the participation of a "pittore Greco" in the decoration of the Villa Farnese at Caprarola is recorded, no painted work can be associated with this written source. At any rate, the artist became acquainted with a further intellectual at the Palazzo Farnese, a man who now became his most significant patron in Rome: the humanist and librarian Fulvio Orsini (1529–1600). The inventory of Orsini's collection would later include seven El Grecos, including his portrait of Clovio.

His lost self-portrait, the portrait of Clovio and the *Boy blowing on an Ember to light a Candle* indicate the direction in which El Greco hoped to find a market niche in Rome: that of portraiture. Perhaps the most outstanding example of his work in this genre is his portrait of Vincenzo Anastagi (ill. p. 22). It depicts



Giulio Clovio, c. 1570
Oil on canvas, 58 x 88 cm
Naples, Museo Nazionale di Capodi

The half-length portrait of the miniaturist (whom Vasari called "a minor Michelangelo") employs an unusual format. Visible through the window edge is a view of a landscape under a

A Boy blowing on an Ember to light (El soplón), early 1570s
Oil on canvas, 60.5 x 30.5 cm
Naples, Museo Nazionale di Capodi

In his *Historia Naturalis*, Pliny the Elder depicts several artists who, in painting or a depicted boys blowing into a fire.