



Man of Sorrows by Luis de Morales

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The Man of Sorrows by Luis Morales (or el Divino), a Spanish painter, is a Mannerist painting from the sixteenth century. It is a religious painting of Jesus Christ seated, wearing a crown of thorns and meditating on the Passion. The building tools for the cross are on the floor surrounding Jesus (hammer, awl, nails and broom). - Artsconnected

Biography

Luis de Morales was thought to have lived from c 1509 - 1586, but some put his birthdate as late as 1520. He was born at Badajoz in Extremadura. It is thought that he studied with the Flemish Mannerist painter Peeter de Kempeneer (known in Spain as Pedro de Camparia), who is recorded in Spain from 1537. There is conjecture that Morales visited Italy c 1540, but this seems unlikely. He also seems to have had contact with Portuguese painting, and had knowledge of German and Flemish prints. His detailed techniques echo a style and forms of Leonardo da Vinci and Raphael.

The Virgin with the Little Bird (1546, Madrid) is Morales' first known painting. Close to that date is his only surviving signed work, the *Madonna of Purity*, which although much altered by Baroque additions, still preserves characteristics that recall Raphael. In 1554 Luis de Morales was paid for an altarpiece of four panels depicting the Annunciation, Adoration of the Magi, the Pieta, and Stigmatization of St. Francis. This painting is in the Badajoz Cathedral.



His work now in the Uffizi Gallery, *Christ Carrying the Cross*, is similar to another of his works that owes inspiration to Sebastiano del Piombo (1485 - 1547) an Italian Mannerist.

De Morales was called *el Divino*, probably because most of his work was religious, and because he painted with such feeling and enthusiasm. He had shocking realism in his paintings, which conveyed the spiritual. The epithet *el Divino* has been applied to Morales since at least the early 18th century. He expressed the impassioned spirituality of the Spanish society, an achievement equalled only by El Greco. Morales concentrated on themes related to the Madonna and Child, Passion of Christ, the Pieta.



Scenes from the Passion of Christ dominate Morales work. Particularly of interest to him was the *Ecce Homo* (The Man of Sorrows). Our painting relates to that interest, and at least one other painting of the Man of Sorrows by Morales is known. He also painted several *Pietas*. The term *Pieta*, means the painting of Jesus' crucified body being held by his mother, Mary.

Luis de Morales was most active from the 1560's. He did the *Life of Christ* for the high altar of *Nuestra Señora de la Asuncion in Arroyo de la Luz, Caceres*. He worked stylistically with a fusion of Flemish and Italian elements. This is the period in which scholars feel the MIA painting was created.

He was well known and enthusiastically received through Spain, but Phillip II preferred Italian painters and did not share the enthusiasm for de Morales' paintings. He had only one commission from Phillip II, *Christ going up to Calvary*. However, In his old age, Morales was destitute, and Phillip II did grant him a pension in 1581.

Luis de Morales' paintings are in cathedrals and museums in Europe and America. To name a few, his paintings are in the Prado, (The Prado has an excellent version of the *Presentation in the Temple*). Other important works are in the National Gallery in Dublin, at the Louvre, the Hermitage (St. Petersburg), and in museums at Stuttgart, Basle and Dresden. (Some of this was taken from Wikipedia and Oxford Art Online)

The Passion (Christianity)

The Passion is the Christian theological term used for the events and suffering - the physical, spiritual, and mental suffering of Jesus in the days before and during his execution by crucifixion. The etymological origins of the word Passion lie in the Greek verb *Pascho*, to suffer. References are found in passages such as Matthew 17:12, and parallel passages in Mark and Luke and Acts 1:3. The Latin word "passio" is used in the Vulgate translation of the Bible. The term first appears in 2nd century Christian texts precisely to describe the travails and suffering of Jesus in this present context. The word passion has since taken on a more general application and now also describes the accounts of Christian martyrs.

Those parts of the four Gospels (first four books of the New Testament of the Christian Bible) that describe these events are known as the "Passion narratives." The non-canonical Gospel of Peter is also a Passion narrative. The passion is part of the Christian liturgical calendar, and is commemorated in Holy Week, beginning on Palm Sunday and ending on Easter Sunday.

Artists often portrayed the following subjects - Jesus' Arrest, Sanhedrin Trial, Pilate's Court, Flagellation, Crown of Thorns, *Via Dolorosa* (The Way of the Cross), Crucifixion, and the removal of the body of Jesus from the cross.

The MIA has many Christian religious paintings, in addition to this painting by de Morales. Paintings were often commissioned by the church, as well as by royalty and

wealthy people who desired paintings for meditation, especially for their private chapels. These paintings have been preserved and are found in churches, monasteries, and other religious sites, as well as in museums.



Luis de Morales' painting
Madonna and Child is in the Prado Museum.

The Man of Sorrows Painting by Luis de Morales (El Divino)

Our painting is oil on panel. It was probably painted around 1560 in Spain. The artist painted many paintings at about this time, mainly from the Christian Bible. Very little has been written about the painting, *The Man of Sorrows*, which is found at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts in Gallery 341. In fact, there is no label in evidence. I did find the pictures and references to it in the MIA library, but almost nothing about the painting itself. Evidently there was a label which has been removed, but it is not for circulation.

From observation of the scene portrayed in our painting, a museum staff person wrote the paragraph from Artsconnected quoted above. We learn this: *Jesus Christ seated wearing a crown of thorns, meditating quietly on the Passion. Cross and building tools are on the floor surrounding him (hammer, awl, nails and broom).*

When I first saw this painting I was puzzled. In some ways it is surprising that he is alone, given the New Testament description of his situation. His questioning and torture were intense, not leaving much time for meditation. Surely, his guards would not have left him alone in the room with a pillar or column, unguarded and unbound. It seemed to me that Jesus' face portrayed weariness and fatigue, rather than agony. I didn't notice the crown of thorns.

To me, the painting seemed more recent than the 16th Century. People may need help to understand the setting and the circumstance of this portrayal of Jesus. We observe an excellent use of light and shadows (chiaroscuro) in the painting. Notice the light on Jesus' beautiful robe. We can also note that this is a Mannerist painting. Museum

visitors may need an understanding of Mannerism. Jesus would have been very tall had he been standing. His body, hands and fingers are elongated. As you recall Mannerist paintings were often filled with emotion and symbolism. Although artists of the 16th century were indebted to the Renaissance painters, they chose less realism than those painters.

The MIA has a print by Albrecht Durer entitled *The Man of Sorrows by the Column*. You might like to compare these two pieces of art. Do you think that de Morales might have seen Durer's 1509 engraving? This painting is not on view, but a copy could be made from ArtsConnected.

In the time I have been studying here at the MIA, I have heard no mention of Luis de Morales or his painting, *Man of Sorrows*. I was intrigued by the painting, and spent some time in research and found very little about it. I have searched Artsconnected and done some work in the MIA library and find next to nothing. I believe that this painting deserves more attention than it seems to have, I think it could and should be used on tours to good advantage.

Man of Sorrows by the Column

by Albrecht Durer, 1509

How is this picture different from the one by Luis de Morales?

How is it the same?

Key Questions



What do you think is happening in this painting? Who do you think the man in this painting is?

How would you compare the painting by de Morales, with this copy of the engraving by Albrecht Durer?

What are the objects on the floor?

Would you be surprised if I told you that this painting was from the 16th century?

How tall would Jesus be if he stood up?

If you have seen other paintings of Jesus, how is it like them and how different?
What feelings do you get from the painting?

Key Points

The *Man of Sorrows* is by Luis de Morales of Spain who was active in the 16th Century. He was a Mannerist painter who was influenced by the Northern European Art of Burgundy, as well as Italian artists of the Renaissance. Mannerism was a movement that followed the Renaissance. Its paintings had warmth and emotion, and sought to move away from the realism of that time. Bodies were elongated.

Though he is not very familiar to most of us, the artist, Luis de Morales was well known and appreciated by the culture in Spain in the 16th century. Even today his paintings are in many renowned museums, especially in Europe.

His "nick name" was *el divino*, which was widely used to refer to him by the start of the 18th century. It was used because he frequently painted religious scenes from the New Testament and because he was so enthusiastic and passionate about the spirituality conveyed in his paintings.

Luis de Morales's pictures were frequently set in the period referred to as "The Passion." This is emphasized in the liturgical Christian calendar in a period called Holy week, right before Easter. It is the week in which Jesus was arrested, tried, persecuted, and crucified. Some people will not know about this Christian tradition, so some explanation may need to be given.

Resources: Wikipedia, Oxford Art Online, Catholic Encyclopedia and the Uffizi Gallery