

PICASSO

AND THE SPANISH TRADITION



Edited by

JONATHAN BROWN

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With contributions by

JONATHAN BROWN SUSAN GRACE GALASSI

ROBERT S. LUBAR ROBERT ROSENBLUM

GERTJE UTLEY

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Picasso and the Spanish Tradition



Frontispiece: Pablo Picasso, *Spanish Still Life*, Céret, May-June 1912.
Oil and Ripolin on canvas, 46 × 33 cm.
Villeneuve d'Ascq, Musée d'Art Moderne,
Gift of Jean and Genevieve Masurel.

Contributors

JONATHAN BROWN has written many books and articles on the history of Spanish art, including *The Golden Age of Painting in Spain*, Yale, 1991. He is Carroll and Milton Petrie Professor of Fine Arts at New York University's Institute of Fine Arts.

ROBERT S. LUBAR, a specialist in modern French and Spanish art, is assistant professor at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University. He is the author of *Divided Landscapes: Essays on Art, Culture, and Politics in Modern Spain, 1898–1939* (Yale University Press, forthcoming).

ROBERT ROSENBLUM, professor of fine arts at New York University, has often written about Picasso in articles ranging from "Picasso and the Typography of Cubism" to "War and Peace: Antiquity and late Picasso."

GERTJE UTLEY, an independent scholar, participated in the organization of *Vienna 1900* at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. In recent years she has written and lectured on Picasso's later career, the subject of her doctoral dissertation, now in progress.

SUSAN GRACE GALASSI is associate curator at The Frick Collection and the author of *Picasso's Variations on the Masters: Confronting the Past* (Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1996).

Acknowledgments

THE GERM OF THIS BOOK was planted at the great Picasso exhibition, held at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 1980. After viewing it, I experienced the uncanny feeling of having seen the work of a Spanish old master lurking just beneath the surface of these seminal creations of modern art. The shock of recognition was amplified by the fact that everything I had learned or read about the artist situated him within the heroic narrative of French modernism. Indeed, it was in this context that his pictures were usually exhibited in the permanent installation of the museum.

The years passed, and thoughts of Picasso were crowded out by other pursuits, notably research on and writing and teaching about Spanish art of the Golden Age. However, in 1992, there was an opportunity to test my instinct about Picasso's involvement with the art and culture of his native land. In that year, the Spanish Institute in New York, a private, non-profit-making organization which promotes relations between Spain and the U.S.A., decided to initiate an annual symposium on Picasso. I took advantage of my chairmanship of the Fine Arts Advisory Committee to suggest "Picasso and the Spanish Tradition" as the topic for the inaugural session.

The symposium took place on 25 April 1992 and was sponsored by a generous grant from the Consul General of Spain in New York, Ambassador Miguel de Aldasoro. Arrangements were made by Dr. Suzanne L. Stratton, now Vice-President of the Institute and the coordinator of its ambitious fine-arts program. At the end of the event, the participants agreed that the results had met and perhaps exceeded our expectations and that our papers might have something to contribute to an understanding of this wellspring of Picasso's art. We decided to prepare them for publication and, along the way, invited Gertje Utley to join our group by contributing an essay on Picasso's post-war period.

In the four years since the symposium, we have extensively revised our contributions, exchanging ideas as we went along. The spirit of our cooperative venture is, we hope, reflected in this book, as well as a cohesiveness that results from the camaraderie of the contributors, all of whom work within a small area of Manhattan, with the Institute of Fine Arts of New York University at its center.

In addition to the generosity of Ambassador Aldasoro and the efficacy of Dr. Stratton, we wish to thank Professor James R. McCredie, Director of the Institute of Fine Arts, for arranging a subvention for this publication. Our

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Jonathan Brown
Princeton, 9 February 1996

Preface

THE QUESTION OF Picasso's relation to Spanish tradition might seem both superfluous and perilous. His Spanish origins are a matter of fact, while his place within the "French School" is widely accepted. Libraries in the U.S.A. reflect this consensus by classifying him as a French artist. (Spaniards and Catalans, however, have never doubted that Picasso was truly Spanish or Catalan, depending on their patriotic allegiance.) Nevertheless, there is a growing awareness that this formulation is too facile and that Picasso's "Spanishness" is not a mere accident of birth or a question of spiritual osmosis.

The definition of the Spanish component of Picasso through reference to Spanish tradition is the perilous part. Tradition has become a loaded word, and its usage here requires a few lines of explanation. For writers in the past, an artistic tradition was understood as a pattern of accumulated ideas and practices. It was exemplified by recognized masters whose work served as a reference and stimulus for later generations. More recently, tradition has acquired another meaning, as an ideological construction of history, often manifested in the form of cultural myths. This definition of tradition is frequently encountered in the guise of nationalism, one of the most durable, if sometimes pernicious forms of cultural mythology. These two aspects of tradition are not necessarily contradictory. They may even be seen as complementary or mutually reinforcing, and that is how they are treated in this book.

In the opening essay, an attempt is made to define a Spanish tradition of painting as a set of responses to classicism that were developed over three centuries and epitomized by El Greco, Velázquez, and Goya, the three most universally admired of all Spanish artists. Picasso saw these stars in the heavens and aspired to reach them. By studying their works and absorbing their ideas, he established a position from which he could take an independent stance toward the history of his art.

The first twenty-five years of Picasso's life coincided with a critical moment in the development of nationalism, the origins of which are found in the earlier nineteenth century. It was in this period that nationalistic sentiment, based primarily on linguistic and ethnic criteria, emerged as a potent force in European society, and that the concept of "race," as determined non-genetically, ominously began to coalesce with the idea of nationhood.*

* E.J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780. Programme, Myth, Reality* (2nd. ed., Cambridge, 1991), pp. 101-30.

Robert Lubar shows how the young Picasso was caught between two of the characteristic manifestations of late nineteenth-century nationalism in Spain, the Generation of 1898 in Madrid and Catalan *Modernisme* in Barcelona. Once he had arrived in Paris, Picasso's national identity was cast in yet a different mold, and he was classified by the French as a member of an (admirable) race of outsiders. According to Lubar's argument, Picasso's artistic practice at this time calls into question the visual and literary tropes through which mythic nationalism is constructed, as he sought to create a space in which he might exercise his talents. Yet, later in life, he too succumbed to the power of the ideas of nationalism and the pull of his homeland.

Until the start of the Spanish Civil War, Picasso could play with his Spanish identity to some extent. Robert Rosenblum deciphers the coded, at times unabashedly patriotic, references to Spain in still-life paintings by the artist. In addition, Picasso was able to palliate the pangs of nostalgia by periodic trips across the border. But with the triumph of Franco, this avenue was closed. The point of no return, of course, is *Guernica*, which is not dealt with in detail in this book because it is so well studied. With the victory of the nationalists, the Spain of Picasso's youth was dramatically transformed as a society and as a haunt of the artist's imagination.

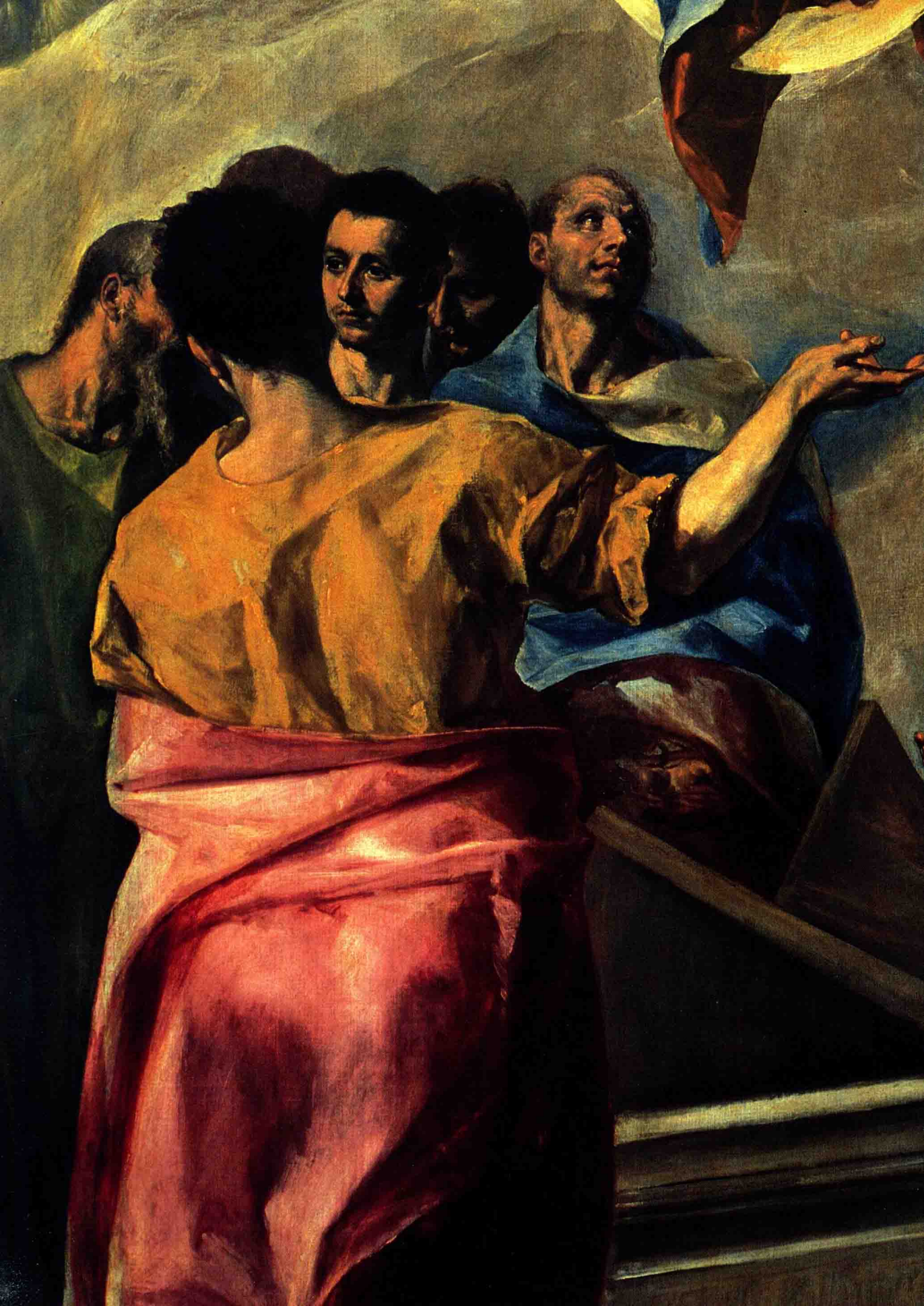
Following the end of the Second World War, the question of Picasso's nationality re-emerged and was re-shaped by the cultural battles which engulfed French political and intellectual life. To his surprise, and initially to his satisfaction, Picasso was hailed as a French cultural hero by the political left. However, as we see in Gertje Utley's meticulous reconstruction of this neglected chapter in Picasso's biography, his prominence invited political attack. Picasso's Spanish identity, which had been to some extent an asset in the early 1900s, now became something of a liability. French xenophobic writers, who surfaced once the dust of war had settled, lumped Picasso with other "aliens" alleged to have contaminated the "purity" of French society and culture. Picasso opted for art instead of politics; he retreated to the south of France and sought solace in the Mediterranean life he remembered from earlier days.

This retreat to the south has long been recognized as prompted by nostalgia, at least in part. There, Picasso created a "mundillo español," a little Spanish world, inhabited by friends and visitors from Spain, and furnished with memories of a distant but still vivid childhood. Picasso's longing for Spain was frustrated of course by Franco, whose dreams and lies now ruled his homeland. But if the Spanish present was closed to the artist, the past remained a free country, and especially its artistic past, into which Picasso made occasional, feverish sorties. Susan Grace Galassi is our guide to one of the most famous of these imaginative tours of the history of Spanish art, the "Variations on Velázquez's *Las Meninas*," through which Picasso again confronted an artist who was one of his original sources of inspiration and an enduring challenge to his creative powers.

Picasso's engagement with Spanish tradition, as presented in these pages, is a

dynamic, unfolding story. Unlike the members of the Generation of 1898, who sought to identify elements of an immutable Spain, Picasso's vision of Spain continually changed during his long life. The Spain of Francisco Franco was a very different place from the Spain of Alfonso XIII; the aged Picasso had long ceased to be the rebellious, penniless youth who had gone to Paris to seek his fortune and test his powers. At some point, Spain for Picasso ceased to be a reality and became an idea, a memory, an essence at once immutable and evanescent.

Picasso took pride in being an outsider who stood somewhat apart from the myths and mores of French intellectual life. His Spanish identity, however much its construction was transformed, provided him with the counter-myth needed to resist the power of French culture and the grand tradition it professed to embody. The tension between the allure of French ideas and the compelling histories of his homeland proves to have been a crucial element in Picasso's art and thought.



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I *Picasso and the Spanish Tradition of Painting*

JONATHAN BROWN

IF PICASSO WITHOUT PARIS is unthinkable, Picasso without Madrid hardly merits a thought. The young artist lived in the Spanish capital on two occasions. From October 1897 to June 1898, he spent an apparently aimless year as a student at the Real Academia de Bellas Artes, and in January 1901, he returned for a few months to work on the publication, *Arte Joven*. From all appearances, Madrid, admittedly one of the most provincial cities of *fin-de-siècle* Europe, provided little of value to Picasso's formation, and the unhappy memories of those chilly, cheerless months have colored all his biographies. However, Madrid had one great asset that was to prove crucial to the development of Picasso's artistic imagination—the Museo del Prado. It was there that he encountered the three great past masters of Spanish painting who would continue to haunt his mind and challenge his powers—El Greco, Velázquez, and Goya.¹

Picasso first visited the Prado in April or May 1895, when his family, en route to Málaga from La Coruña, broke the trip for a day in Madrid.² His father, Don José Ruiz, a mediocre academic painter, took him for a quick tour of the museum, which allowed the boy only enough time to make two small sketches after works in the collection (Museu Picasso, Barcelona). His eye was caught by Velázquez's portraits of two marginal figures at the court of Philip IV, the dim-witted jester Don Juan de Calabazas and the dwarf El Niño de Vallecas. The choice of these uncharacteristic pictures by Velázquez is telling in the light of Picasso's fascination with the theme of the outsider in works of the Blue Period.

The artist's decisive engagement with the heroes of Spanish painting occurred at the Prado during that unhappy year of 1897–98, when he suffered from poverty, loneliness, and the uninspired tutelage of the royal academy.³ In later life, Picasso tended to minimize the extent of his immersion in the masterpieces of the Prado, but according to his companion during those months, the Argentinian painter Francisco Bernareggi, the two aspiring painters sought refuge from their professors by retreating to the museum.

We spent our days (eight hours a day) studying and copying in the Prado and at night we went (for three hours) to draw from nude models at the Círculo de Bellas Artes.⁴

1 El Greco, *Assumption of the Virgin*, detail of fig. 5.

Bernareggi and Picasso took great pleasure in making copies after El Greco, which was a scandalous pursuit. "That was in 1897, when El Greco was considered a menace," wrote Bernareggi. And when Picasso's father was given some of the students' replicas, his reaction was: "You're taking the wrong road."

While conservative taste may have scorned the art of El Greco, his fame had risen rapidly in advanced artistic circles during the closing years of the century. In Madrid, the spokesman of the pro-Greco movement was Manuel Bartolomé Cossío, who had been promoting his cause since the mid-1880s and who, in 1908, published the pioneering, and still-influential, monograph on the artist.⁵ By 1902, however, El Greco had been admitted into the pantheon of Spanish art. This was the year of the monographic exhibition at the Prado, which was official recognition of El Greco's strange genius.⁶ Thereafter, his detractors fell silent.

Picasso's first stay in Madrid coincided with the final stage of the apotheosis of El Greco, and he was swept along with the tide. More than once, he made a pilgrimage to Toledo and paid homage to El Greco's *Burial of the Count of Orgaz*, in the little parish church of Santo Tomé.⁷ From then on, El Greco was a recurrent point of reference in Picasso's store of imagery.

The young artist's fascination with the other two greats of Spanish painting, Velázquez and Goya, was more in keeping with conventional taste. Both were recognized heroes of Spanish history and culture, and were the subjects of numerous publications. In 1899, public interest in Velázquez reached new heights with the celebration of the third centenary of his birth.⁸ On 6 June, the Prado inaugurated a grandiose installation of his works in the most important gallery of the museum, and one week later, on 14 June, a statue of the artist was unveiled in front of the entrance on the Paseo del Prado, where it still stands. When Picasso returned to Madrid in January 1901, he could see Velázquez in all his glory.

Goya was more conspicuous still, thanks to the wide circulation of his prints.⁹ The academy owned the original plates of *Los Caprichos*, *La Tauromaquia*, *Los Desastres de la Guerra*, and *Los Disparates*, and had published them in 1890–91 (sixth edition), 1876 (third edition), 1892 (second edition), and 1891 (third edition), respectively. Picasso's identification with Goya was first recognized by Miquel Utrillo in an article published in the June 1901 issue of *Pèl & Ploma*, where he referred to his friend as "le petit Goya."¹⁰ Many years later, this sobriquet was still apt; as André Malraux observed in 1974: "Picasso spoke to me of Goya more than of any other artist."¹¹

Documenting Picasso's obsession with the Spanish masters is not so difficult; evaluating their impact on his work is more demanding. It is easy, of course, to identify Picasso's appropriations of motifs and compositions from the great painters of Spain, as has been done. However, his affinity for his artistic ancestors runs deeper than borrowed poses and gestures.

The bond between Picasso and the Spanish masters has sometimes been regarded as a spiritual one. John Richardson spoke for many students of Picasso when he wrote: "El Greco would help Picasso exploit the ecstasy, anguish and

morbid sense of sin of his black Spanish faith . . ."¹² This is certainly true, but on at least one occasion, Picasso saw the connection in purely formal terms. "Cubism is Spanish in origin, and it was I who invented Cubism. We should look for Spanish influence in Cézanne. . . . Observe El Greco's influence on him. A Venetian painter but he is Cubist in construction."¹³ Picasso liked to shock and mislead when he spoke about his art, although this does not mean that he is always to be mistrusted. El Greco and the other painters of Spain comprise a distinct tradition within the history of European art, one that is often acknowledged but has never been adequately defined. This tradition was assimilated by Picasso, starting in his student days in Madrid, and it provided him with a position on the margins of the mainstream of European art. By analyzing the works of El Greco, Velázquez, and Goya, Picasso could see how these great artistic forebears had criticized and interpreted the classical tradition.

By the middle of the eighteenth century at the latest, the classical tradition had become the universally accepted standard for artistic training and creation, and this makes it tempting to conceive of the history of post-medieval painting in Europe as an inexorable progress toward the triumph of the grand manner. The painters of Spain, however, adopted an independent stance towards classicism, which they regarded as an option, not as an imperative. Thus, some ignored it, others combined it with different stylistic currents and still others purposely altered or discarded it as irrelevant to their purposes. The result, which might be characterized as provincial by many upholders of the classical canon, is better defined by the term counterclassical.

The complex origins of Spanish counterclassicism can be traced to the fifteenth century. In the 1400s, Spanish painting was conditioned by two factors: the presence of innumerable examples of Flemish art and the lack of systematic interest in Greco-Roman antiquity, buttressed by the theoretical writings of Italian humanism. The consequences of these conditions are manifest in the work of Pedro Berruguete (ca. 1450–1503), the leading painter in Castile at the end of the fifteenth century.¹⁴ Berruguete was schooled in the Hispano-Flemish tradition, but he was in Italy in the 1470s and possibly worked for Federigo da Montefeltro, duke of Urbino and patron of Piero della Francesca. By 1483 he had returned to Spain and thereafter diluted his Italianism with large measures of the Flemish style preferred by Castilian clients. This hybrid manner is evident in the *Annunciation* (fig. 2), executed around 1490 for an altarpiece in Santa Eulalia in Paredes de Nava. His idiosyncratic interpretation of Italianate elements becomes apparent when this work is compared with Leonardo da Vinci's *Annunciation* of 1478 (fig. 3), which was painted while Berruguete was in Italy.

For Leonardo, symmetry, balance, and proportion were the essential elements in producing a smoothly flowing narrative. As we know from other works, Leonardo began by constructing the perspective and then integrated the figures into the composition, adjusting their scale, and that of ancillary objects or attributes, to the surrounding space. The figures are solidly rendered and

