



Studio of PEDRO FERNÁNDEZ DE MURCIA

(active circa 1489 – 1523)

Christ carrying the cross.

Oil tempera on canvas laid on panel.

115.8 x 83.5 cm.

Provenance: Swiss private collection. This hitherto unpublished painting of Christ carrying the cross provides an insight into a fascinating chapter within Renaissance painting of the Iberian Peninsula in the early 16th century. The great artistic innovations of the Italian High Renaissance brought about by the triumvirate of Leonardo (1452 – 1519), Raphael (1483 – 1520) and Michelangelo (1475 – 1564) and the political circumstances in Italy, encouraged and inspired Iberian painters to travel to Italy

towards the end of the 15th century, in order to develop their artistic skills. This occurred initially in Lombardy, in close proximity to Leonardo da Vinci, who at the time was working at the court of the Sforza in Milan (1482 – 1499) and, after a temporary return to Florence (1500 – 1506), later renewed his activities in Milan which was by then under French control. Amongst the Iberian artists who had migrated to Italy and whose path must have crossed that of Leonardo, were Fernando Llanos (active circa 1506 – 1516), Fernando Yanez (circa 1475 – 1536), Alfonso Berruguette (circa 1488 – 1561) and Pedro Fernández. While Fernando Yanez and Fernando Llanos probably accompanied Leonardo from Milan to Florence, where they supported the Florentine artist in his work “The Battle of Anghiari”, and then, after Leonardo’s return to Milan, themselves returned to their Spanish homeland, Pedro Fernández then travelled from Milan to Naples and Rome, where he worked until the second decade of the 16th century. Pedro Fernández is of interest to us in relation to this panel, as his artistic development was initially closely linked to the artistic events of the Milanese metropolis, which at the time was influenced by Leonardo da Vinci, Zenale (circa 1460 – 1526) and Bramantino (circa 1456 – circa 1530). It is no coincidence that before our painter was identified as Pedro Fernández, he was referred to by art historians under the name “Pseudo-Bramantino”. This painter, after his initial years in Milan, is recorded as having been in Naples and Rome and his idiosyncratic and sometimes extremely expressive style reveals itself – when reduced to the simplest denominator - as a kind of synthesis of Leonardo da Vinci and Bramantino, paired with traces of Michelangelo’s and Raphael’s Roman works. In the course of the second decade of the 16th century the Spaniard presumably returned to his homeland, where in 1521 he created the high altar dedicated to Saint Elena in the Cathedral of Girona. It is precisely in this altar where we recognise most clearly the stylistic links with the present panel. Such is the case in the powerful figures seen from the back, which have been brought to the foreground, and are a defining pictorial feature in the present painting also. Thus, figures such as the young soldier dragging the cross, seen from the back, with his close-fitting garments which accentuate the gluteus muscles, are similar to those

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seen in the Saint Elena cycle in Girona. Such figures, depicted as a back view with the body somewhat twisted round, are a clear indication of a knowledge of Michelangelo's frescoes in the Sistine chapel (1508 – 1512), just as in our picture the faces of the old men can be recognised as derived from the type seen in the works of Leonardo. The figures, with their slightly caricatured facial features reminiscent of Leonardo's character studies, appear closely related to the repertoire of types in the work of Pedro Fernández, in whose workshop this painting was probably produced around 1520. Our thanks to Prof. Dr. Gaudenz Freuler for his support in cataloguing this painting.

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