



**JAIME EGUIGUREN**

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**Pedro de Mena**

17<sup>th</sup> century

**A NEW PAIR OF BUSTS  
ECCE HOMO AND DOLOROSA**

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## Pedro de Mena

(Granada, Spain, 1628-1688 Málaga)

### *A New Pair of Busts: Ecce Homo and Dolorosa*

Partially-gilt polychrome wood

Ecce Homo 31 x 24 x 15 cm    Dolorosa 31 x 24 x 15 cm

Provenance: Spain, Miguel Granados



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Depictions of the subject of Ecce Homo and the Virgin of Sorrows bear witness to the major development of Passion imagery in the Spanish Baroque, second only to the central episode of Christian art, Christ on the cross<sup>1</sup>. The subject we are dealing with here was, in turn, particularly significant in the Granada school, the context into which we can slot Pedro de Mena's early artistic period or stage.

These types of devotional Passion images were part of the religious worship of the day, and were adapted to the demands and requirements of the Council of Trent, the famous decree dealing with the worship and veneration of holy images<sup>2</sup>, partly conceived of as a way of highlighting the painful aspects of the Passion in order to elicit an emotive response in believers. Pedro de Mena adapted his art to these exigencies with sublime skill, working the most expressive elements in an exceptional fashion and creating works that invited the viewer to prayer. His sculptures were intended to be venerated in the privacy of chapels, convents and palaces, with the aim of maximizing their emotional charge and encouraging an intimate visual connection and communication between the believer and the image depicted.



Fig.1 José de Ribera, *Ecce Homo*, Jaime Eguiguren Art & Antiques

Many examples have survived to this day (or for which we have documentary proof), spread across the majority of Spain, with records of works even reaching America<sup>3</sup>. The Passion figures of Ecce Homo and Dolorosa were one of Pedro de Mena's most common and characteristic compositions, either individually or as a pair, as in the case of the busts were are examining here. However, this was not an iconographic subject created by Mena, but one with a popular history in European art both in sculpture and painting (Fig. 1 Jaime Eguiguren's *Ecce Homo* by Ribera). This type of composition was most common (though not exclusive) to the artist's Malaga period (1658-1688), therefore belonging to his later

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<sup>1</sup> LÓPEZ-GUADALUPE MUÑOZ, Juan Jesús: "Between the narration and the symbol. Iconography of Ecce Homo in the Baroque sculpture of Granada", in the Bulletin of Art, n° 29, Department of the History of Art, University of Malaga, 2008, page 85-111.

<sup>2</sup> RODRÍGUEZ G. DE CEBALLOS, Alfonso, "The repercussion in Spain of the decree of the Council of Trent on sacred images and censorship of El Greco", Studies in the History of Art, Vol. 13, Symposium Papers II: El Greco: Italy and Spain, National Gallery of Art, 1984, page 153-159.

<sup>3</sup> Examples from Lima and Mexico, see info in Note 10 of the other text.

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works and, as such, to the period that would, implicitly, see an increase in the involvement of the other artists active in his workshop.

This sort of sculpture, cut horizontally and normally arranged on a wooden pedestal, were executed based on three different models, defined by their size. On the one hand we have *elongated busts* (Fig. 3), which go down to the hip, measuring in the region of 95 cm high. Secondly, we have the *intermediate type* (Fig. 4), half-length sculptures including arms and hands and measuring a little less than the elongated version. Finally, the third in the group, and varying in height between 30 cm and 60 cm, are the *short busts* (Fig. 5), corresponding to the two sculptures we are exhibiting here, and which make up the majority of sculptural works depicting Ecce Homo and Dolorosa. The abundance and dissemination of this sort of small-scale sculpture is explained in terms of its ease of transportation, and the fact that this helped to keep prices down, despite how highly-prized Mena's work was during his lifetime.



Fig. 3 Pedro de Mena, *Ecce Homo*, polychrome wood, Museo Nacional de Escultura, Valladolid



Fig. 4 Pedro de Mena, *Dolorosa*, polychrome wood, Sacristy of Catedral de Cuenca



Fig. 5 Pedro de Mena, *Dolorosa*, polychrome wood, Daniel Katz Collection

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Although the close relationship between all preserved groups is quite clear, no identical examples have been identified, which proves (and this bears witness to his great professionalism and creative capabilities) that Mena tried hard to introduce differences and to maximize the individual quality of each carving.

The busts depicting Ecce Homo (31 x 24 x 15 cm) (Fig. 6) and Dolorosa (31 x 24 x 15 cm) (Fig. 7) that we are presenting here, and which had belonged to the Granados Collection in Madrid since ----, are made of carved, polychrome wood, and present an excellent state of preservation, with careful cleaning having restored the original polychromy, highlighting new areas of gilding in both the Virgin's cloak and in that of Christ, establishing both unity and harmony between the two sculptures, and making it clear that the artist intended the two works to form a pair. With the same unifying goal, and paying attention to their execution, we can also state that, contrary to tradition, they are not hollow, in all probability on account of their small size, being at the small end of the short bust category. Both sculptures are of a triangular composition, the head held high, looking straight ahead and arranged on a vertical axis. Their body language is further underlined by their gaze, looking emphatically and piercingly straight at the viewer, with a marked level of expression that combines harmoniously with the unquestionable and characteristic pain and tension contained in these depictions. The artist thereby seeks to evoke a completely front-on directness, something he also achieved with the pair of busts preserved in Luxembourg's *Musée National d'Histoire et d'Art* (Figs. 8a & 8b) and in that of *Museo Nacional de Escultura de Valladolid* (Fig. 8). At the same time, the posture of the two figures contrasts with the majority of the Granada artist's output, as most of his works were characterized by showing the head slightly tilted or turning upwards or downwards. On the other hand, there are sculptures of Dolorosa and Ecce Homo linked to Mena that were conceived of as individual works, with no pair, and which match the front-on approach and direct gaze we observe here, such as the *Dolorosa* from Valladolid's Museo Nacional de Escultura (Fig. 9) or the *Ecce Homo* from the Monasterio de Guadalupe (Cáceres).

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Fig. 6 Pedro de Mena, *Ecce Homo*, polychrome wood, Jaime Eguiguren Art & Antiques



Fig. 7 Pedro de Mena, *Dolorosa*, polychrome wood, Jaime Eguiguren, Art & Antiques

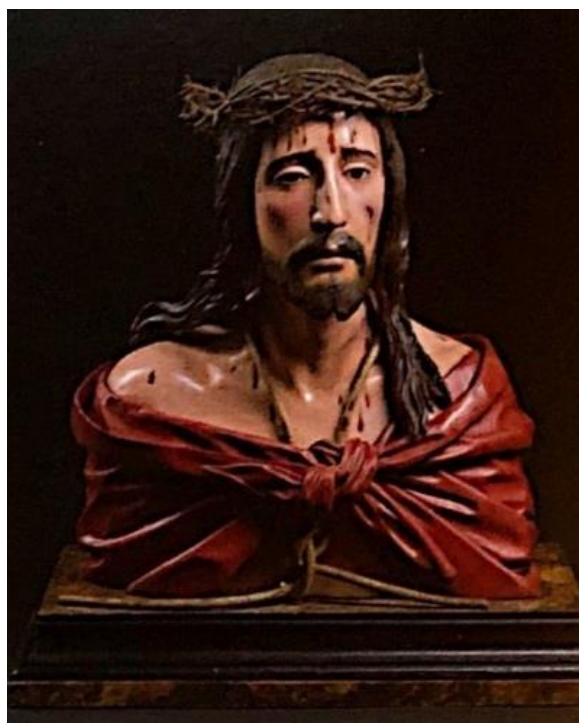


Fig. 8a Pedro de Mena, *Ecce Homo*, polychrome wood, Musée National d'Histoire Et d'Art, Luxemburg

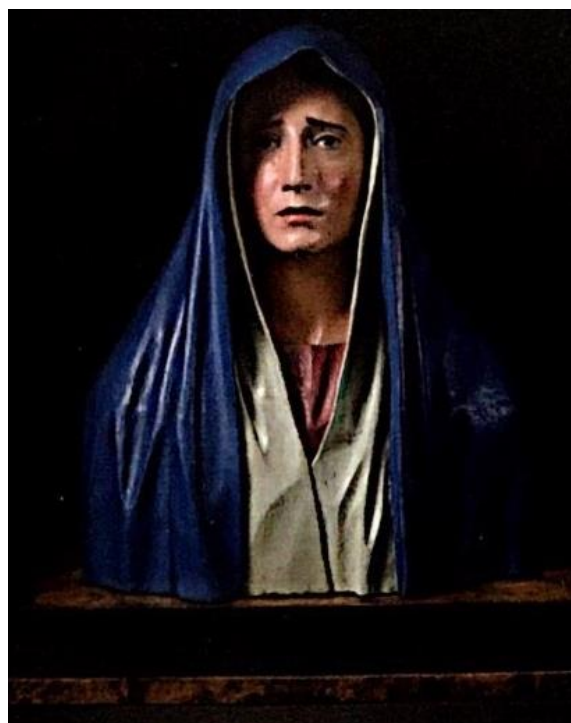


Fig. 8b Pedro de Mena, *Dolorosa*, polychrome wood, Musée National d'Histoire Et d'Art, Luxemburg



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Our figures have narrow painted eyebrows that contract and arch over the brow, generating the sort of oblique and consubstantial lines that were typical in Mena's work, as well as large brown eyes, made of glass, with the intention of accentuating their realism. The tears rolling down the Virgin's face are made of the same vitreous material, matching those of the majority of his works depicting Mary (Fig. 10)



Fig. 9 Pedro de Mena, *Dolorosa*, polychrome wood, Museo Nacional de Escultura de Valladolid



Fig. 10 Pedro de Mena, *Dolorosa*, polychrome wood, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

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The relief effect of the two faces is vigorous and yet not very deep, thereby achieving a sense of smoothness and uniformity, while the carnations are fundamentally matt, presenting an understated brilliance and red patches on the cheeks and other expressive areas.



Fig. 11 Pedro de Mena, *Ecce Homo*, polychrome wood, Museo Nacional de Escultura, Valladolid

The carving of *Ecce Homo* presents numerous technical and formal details that we will have to address, it being worth highlighting those contained in the face, which bore the full expressive burden, given it is limited or restricted by the lack of compositional details such as arms or legs that might otherwise share some of the load in terms of the work's communicational intentionality. It is therefore necessary to point out the fine relief work and virility achieved in Christ's long face, which is more pronounced in this case due to the lack of crown. The arched and half-open mouth reveals a few partially blooded teeth, standing below a thin moustache and a thick cropped beard, parted in the middle, thereby ensuring the composition's symmetry. His head of hair, which seems damp, has received the contouring characteristic of Mena's work, but falls vertically down on the two sides, onto both shoulders, a device not often used by the Granada artist, but which we can observe in

the *Ecce Homo* of Museo Nacional de Escultura of Valladolid (Fig. 11). The features of the pointed face draw parallels with some of the best works to have come out of Mena's workshop such as the pair of sculptures belong to the Descalzas Reales de Madrid (Fig. 12). Another important element used as a dramatic device is the blood splattered on his forehead, while simultaneously running down from his nose, mouth and eyes, dripping down his torso in two trails that come together in a single brushstroke at the base of the collarbone, a device we find frequently in our painter, and which gives us an indication about the originality of the polychromy (Fig.13).



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Fig. 12 Pedro de Mena, *Ecce Homo and Dolorosa*, polychrome wood, Descalzas Reales de Madrid



Fig. 13 Pedro de Mena, *Ecce Homo*, polychrome wood, Chapel of Palacio de San Telmo

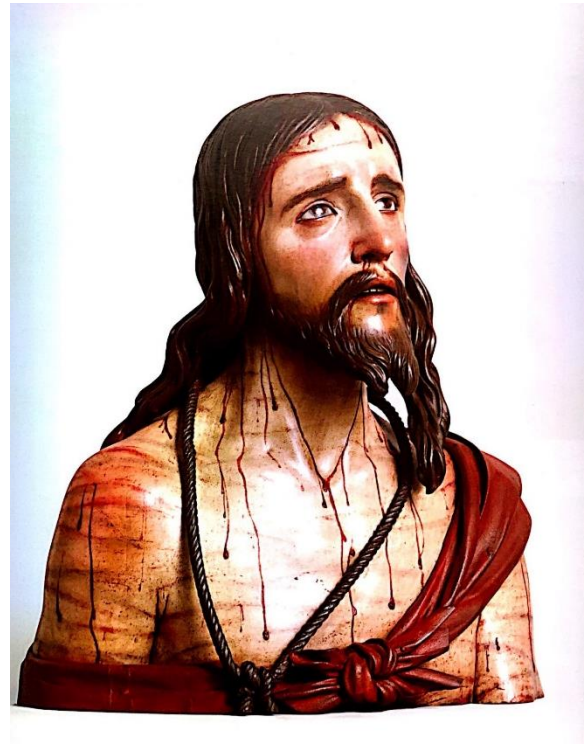


Fig. 14 Pedro de Mena, *Ecce Homo*, polychrome wood, Church of San Luis de Los Franceses, Seville

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Another element that helps us to categorize this Ecce Homo short bust is that Christ is depicted dressed, wearing a red cloak used to cover his shoulders, as was the case with the examples from Luxembourg and the Museo de Escultura de Valladolid, and which is fastened in the middle of his chest, looped into a knot with two pointed ends which are asymmetrically arranged within the composition, contrasting with the horizontally-balanced knot ends seen in other sculptures by our artist (Fig. 14)

Finally, it worth highlighting the figure's expressiveness, in accordance Baroque visual art ideals, charged with communicative potency thanks to its intense and self-absorbed gaze, full of resignation, pain and sadness. Christ's upright pose, looking straight ahead, provides a masterly expression of the moment he was presented to the people in Pontius Pilate's praetorium.

The Virgin of Sorrow's oval face, in harmony with that of Ecce Homo, traces out a highly-defined profile which was frequent in the output of the artist's studio works of this nature. Her broad-browed face, with large brown eyes looking straight ahead with an intense and penetrating gaze, wide eyebrows, straight nose and small mouth, is framed by the white veil arranged in between the inner red tunic and blue cloak, hiding her ears and hair, and generating an intentional feeling of gloom that heightens the emotive charge. Her head rests on a long, cylindrical and straight neck, which shares its matt carnation with the face, whose sense of realism is emphasized by the red of her cheeks and the glass tears bearing witness to her pain.

It is as such that this Lady of Sorrows shares the physiognomy and emotive charge of our artist's female Passion works, with it being worth highlighting its parallels with the sculptures preserved in the Chapel of the Palacio de San Telmo (Fig. 15) and in the Church of San Luis de los Franceses. (Fig. 16) The polychromy used for her clothes is also what one would expect of Immaculate Conception liturgy. As has been the case for a number of sculptures by Pedro de Mena, the lavish decoration of the clothing has been obscured by subsequent interventions which, however, in this case we have been able to salvage, revealing the gilt work accompanying the round-necked crimson tunic that serves as the first layer covering the Virgin. Less prominent is the ivory white veil which, in a demonstration of technical skill, Mena depicted with fine, long folds that combine with encrustations of natural fabric. Finally, the third and outer layer, is the blue cloak which, covering her head, shoulders and back, boasts beautiful gilt work to rival that of the clothing worn by Ecce Homo.

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Fig. 15 Pedro de Mena, *Dolorosa*, polychrome wood, Chapel of Palacio de San Telmo



Fig. 16 Pedro de Mena, *Dolorosa*, polychrome wood, Church of San Luis de Los Franceses, Seville

This highly expressive pleading depiction perfectly balances the demand for Marian youthfulness as denoted by the narrative tempo of the Passion episode of the Bible, with the emotions, anguish and tension relating to the pain of a mother.

As a final point, and in conclusion, we would remind readers that the pair of Passion sculptures on display here unite the main characteristics of the Granada artist's short bust works, with particularly expressive faces, as demanded by the fact that they lack any other compositional elements that might share the emotional burden. Due to their small size, we agree with the scholars in concluding they were conceived of to be arranged and venerated in the intimacy of chapels in churches, convents or private buildings, sitting on altars or tables of a height that would put them on a direct eye-level with viewers, thereby enveloping them in an aura that would have an impact on them, moving them to emotion. Their unquestionable quality and their ability to fulfil the fundamental demands of worship, justifies the cataloguing and inclusion of our two sculptures in the catalogue of the "Granatensis Malacae" exhibition about Pedro de Mena that took place this year in Malaga's Palacio Arzobispal, curated by Dr. José Luis Romero de Torres<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> ROMERO TORRES, José Luis, "Pedro de Mena. Granatensis", AUTOR-EDITOR, Malaga, 2019.



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