

PRESS RELEASE

ON THE OCCASION OF HER ONE-HUNDREDTH BIRTHDAY: PATRON DONATES PROMINENT RIBERA PAINTING TO STÄDEL

**JUSEPE DE RIBERA (1591–1652), SAINT JAMES THE GREATER
CA. 1615/16, OIL ON CANVAS, 133.1 X 99.1 CM**

Frankfurt am Main, 8 December 2014. Today Dagmar Westberg is celebrating her one-hundredth birthday at the Städel Museum. On this occasion, the founder of the Dagmar-Westberg-Stiftung and long-time Städel patron is donating an extremely precious and art-historically important work to the Frankfurt museum for its Old Masters collection: the painting *Saint James the Greater* of ca. 1615/16 by Jusepe de Ribera (1591–1652). Ribera is among the most important painters of the seventeenth century, and one who unites the artistic achievements of two European schools in a single person. Born in the province of Valencia, he can be considered the most prominent Spanish painter after Diego Velázquez (1599–1660). He spent his entire life in Italy, however – first in Rome, then in the Spanish vice-kingdom of Naples – and was accordingly also one of the most influential painters of the Italian Baroque. In the Städel Museum, this masterwork will be presented in the large Italian gallery with immediate effect, and thus, after four centuries in private ownership, be placed on view in a public collection for the first time and permanently.

“For nearly two hundred years now, the dedication of individual citizens has been a cornerstone in the continuing existence of the Städel Museum. Within this tradition, Dagmar Westberg is a shining example, and in every respect an outstanding figure to whom we are deeply indebted. Her donation of the *Saint James the Greater* by Ribera can unquestionably be considered a milestone in our museum’s long collection history. We could not have dreamed of a more wonderful gift – and on the special occasion of her one-hundredth birthday, no less. We are delighted and proud that Ms Westberg is celebrating her day of honour in and with the Städel”, museum director Max Hollein commented.

Born in Hamburg in 1914 and a resident of Frankfurt, Dagmar Westberg is one of the most prominent patrons of the city’s Städel Museum. In the past years, she has already taken her birthdays as occasions for supporting the Städel with major donations of artworks and funds. In 2008, for example, Westberg presented the

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museum with, among other works, the altarpiece by the “Master of the von Groote Adoration”, a triptych dating from the first third of the sixteenth century and one of the most outstanding Netherlandish works of its time. In 2013, Dagmar Westberg enabled the museum to purchase a rare lithograph by Francisco Goya and a print by Edvard Munch. With funds from the Dagmar Westberg foundation she moreover regularly supports important purchases for the Städel's Department of Prints and Drawings. Over the past years, drawings by Carl Spitzweg, Max Klinger, Henri Michaux and Almut Heise and works of printmaking by Max Beckmann, Candida Höfer, Tacita Dean and Paul Morrison – to name just a few important examples – have been acquired with her help. Ms Westberg also espouses the general interests and concern of the Städel and has assumed permanent patronage of a gallery in the museum's Old Masters department.

Born to a Baltic-Hamburg family of entrepreneurs, Dagmar Westberg worked for many years for the American consulates general in Hamburg, Berlin and – from the end of World War II onward – Frankfurt am Main. Already her great-uncle Oskar Troplowitz, the inventor of such products as Leukoplast, Hansaplast, Tesa tape and Nivea and responsible for the success of the Beiersdorf company, was a great art patron. He bequeathed twenty-six paintings to the Hamburg Kunsthalle, including masterpieces by French and German artists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries such as Auguste Renoir, Alfred Sisley, Pablo Picasso or Max Liebermann. His great-niece Dagmar Westberg has continued the tradition. She supports not only the Städel Museum but also, with great personal commitment, numerous other social, cultural and educational endeavours. Among the institutions and foundations she has aided are the Frankfurt girls' refuge FeM, the Cronstetten-Stiftung, the German Summer Work Program at Princeton University and the Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main. In 2008 she was awarded the Georg August Zinn Medal of the State of Hesse for her dedication.

**JUSEPE DE RIBERA (JÁTIVA 1591 – 1652 NAPLES)
SAINT JAMES THE GREATER, CA. 1615/16**

Dates and facts

The painting acquired by the Städel Museum shows the apostle James the Greater in the impressive format of 133.1 by 99.1 centimetres, corresponding to the dimensions which, in Roman painting, were characteristic of the so-called *tela d'imperatore* (“imperial canvas”). In the work, the viewer encounters a monumental half-length figure of sheer sculptural presence. The apostle stands before a dark wall and is illuminated by a beam of light strikingly set off against that dark surface – a lighting situation of the kind typical of Caravaggio and his successors. In his right hand he firmly grips his attribute, the long pilgrim's staff; in his left hand, which he holds before

his body, he clutches a book. A further indication of his identity as a pilgrim is the insignia of the two small crossed pilgrim's staffs pinned to the chest of his robe and gleaming in the light. James's hands – toughened by weather and work and quite literally demonstrating his "hands-on" character – have been rendered with the almost provocative naturalism Caravaggio had introduced to art not long before. His garments, a light grey tunic with a vivid red cloak over it, is rich – not in decoration but in volume. The saint has the cloak draped over his left shoulder and gathered on his left arm in such a way that the thick fabric creates an elaborately formed topography of folds. Light and shade lend forceful plasticity to the virtually abstract pattern thus formed. The body performs a slight but perceptible twist; the left shoulder is turned towards the viewer. The contrary directions of the arms and hands lend the figure a certain dynamic. The monumentality of the pose, the arm held before the body in a protective gesture, and the three-dimensional pattern of the folds presenting itself so prominently to the viewer all serve to intensify the presence of the apostle in his virtually stage-like appearance in this painting.

The manner in which this inherent force is tempered by the figure itself is typical of Ribera's style. It is his head, inclined gently to one side, that brings an entirely different facet of the saint into play. Ribera calls attention to the head by making it the only part of the figure placed directly in the beam of light, while also backing it with a light aureole. The apostle gazes at the viewer frontally from deeply dark shining eyes, his lips slightly parted. Everything about his countenance is fine, noble and elegant – the curve of the lips, the contours of the ears, the dynamic strands of wavy brown hair. The gentleness of the face contrasts subtly with the forceful expression of the body. The ambiguity between appearance and apparition, presence and rapture distinguishes the painting as a sensitively conceived masterwork by the early Ribera. He executed it in the years around 1615/16, towards the end of his stay in Rome and shortly before he departed for Naples, where he would reside for the rest of his life.

Art-historical classification

Art scholars initially attributed the painting to the so-called "Master of the Judgement of Solomon" who has meanwhile revealed himself to be a fiction of research. Since 1978 the work has been cited in art-historical literature convincingly and unanimously as an early work by Ribera, and included in all of the relevant *œuvre* catalogues. Not only is the quality of the conception and painterly execution of this painting superb, but also the condition in which it has come down to us. It is above all stylistic comparison with works known for certain to be from Ribera's hand that testify to his authorship, for example the *Saints Peter and Paul* in Strasbourg, the *Saint Sebastian* in Osuna, and the *Penitent Saint Peter* in New York, all of which resemble the Apostle James extremely closely in the formation of the face and modelling of the folds, even down to the smallest detail. A depiction of the same saint in the Prado,

executed around 1630, strikingly shows how, fifteen years later, in a different stylistic phase, Ribera drew on his early work. Yet the painting is highly important not only within the Spanish master's oeuvre, but also with regard to its reception by his contemporaries. Even Diego Velázquez, an artist eight years Ribera's junior, presumably received fundamental impulses from the older master's work for his *Saint Thomas* executed only a few years later and now in the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Orléans.

Provenance

In Rome, the sources tell us, the young painter led the life of a bohemian and quickly made a name for himself with his art. As a result, his paintings were verifiably in the inventories of some of the town's wealthiest collectors. Vincenzo Giustiniani, for instance, known as a patron of Caravaggio, must have cultivated close contact with Ribera and admired him much as he did Caravaggio, whose works are the most numerous represented in his inventory. That listing also mentions a *Saint James the Great* by Ribera's hand in the *tela d'imperatore* format – possibly the very work now in the Frankfurt collection. The twentieth-century collection history of the Städel *Saint James* was recorded thanks to a number of changes of ownership. It first appeared in a catalogue when it was offered at auction by Leo Schidlof in Vienna in 1924. In 1927 it was shown in Berlin in the framework of an exhibition of the Antiquitätenhaus Wertheim; the accompanying catalogue names a certain Ernst Lang as its owner. Two years later, the private collector Ernst Seifert purchased the painting from Ernst Adler, domiciled in Asch, at an auction in the Berlin establishment of Rudolph Lepke. Seifert kept it over the war years, for nearly three decades altogether, and in 1958 sold it to the Munich art dealer Julius Harry Böhrer. The latter sold it in 1964 to a family from whose collection the Bernheimer-Colnaghi art dealership recently obtained possession of it. It was there that the Frankfurt patron Dagmar Westberg purchased it in 2014 so as to present it to the Städel Museum as a gift on 8 December on the occasion of her one-hundredth birthday.

The significance of the acquisition for the Städel collection

At the Städel, the donation fills a gap in the Old Masters holdings. Precisely the beginnings of European Baroque painting, dating back to the decades around 1600 in Italy, were inadequately represented in this public collection. The donation of a *Madonna* by Guercino (ca. 1621/22) from the Beaucamp collection in 2010 was a first important step in remedying this state of affairs. A wide range of links can also be drawn to Guido Reni's Caravaggesque *Christ at the Column* (1604), Dirck van Baburen's *Young Man Singing* (1622) and Massimo Stanzione's *Susanna and the Elders* (ca 1630/35).

“In Ribera’s *Saint James*, an outstanding example of the early reception of Caravaggio has made its way into the collection, where it will introduce a striking accent in our large Italian hall. A painting that stops you in your tracks”, comments Bastian Eclercy, head of the collection of pre-1800 Italian, French and Spanish painting at the Städel Museum.

The major museums of the world – first and foremost the Prado in Madrid and the Museo di Capodimonte in Naples – have works by Ribera in their collections. At the Frankfurt Städel, the absence of a painting by this master has hitherto represented a painful gap. A particular desideratum was a work from the phase in which the young artist was strongly affected by his encounter with the art of Caravaggio. Still in his early twenties, Ribera lived in Rome for at least four years from about 1612 to 1616, and there fell under the spell of that master of chiaroscuro painting and the study of nature. Very few sources shed light on this phase of Ribera’s career, which has only recently gained the recognition it deserves from scholars and the public thanks above all to the major exhibition in Madrid and Naples in 2011/12. That show gave research on the subject a regular boost, as a result of which Ribera’s early work is presently one of the most intensively discussed topics in the literature on the Italian Baroque. Within this context, the acquisition of a large-scale Ribera canvas of the *Penitent Saint Peter* (ca. 1612/13) by the Metropolitan Museum in New York in 2012 attracted a lot of attention, as did the Paris Louvre’s purchase of the artist’s *Saint John the Baptist* the same year. With the new acquisition that has come about through Dagmar Westberg’s gift, the Städel is now in the fortunate position of being able to make a significant contribution to this highly topical discussion.

Jusepe de Ribera (Játiva 1591 – 1652 Naples)
 Saint James the Greater, ca. 1615/16
 Oil on canvas, 133.1 x 99.1 cm
 Frankfurt am Main, Städel Museum
 Donated by Dagmar Westberg, Frankfurt am Main, in 2014

Städel Museum

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