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MUSEO NACIONAL  
DEL **PRADO**

## **The Prado Museum and the Focus-Abengoa Foundation restore a masterpiece by Murillo to its former splendour**

- The work, which was recovered by Abengoa in the United Kingdom, will go on display for several months in the Prado Museum before its definitive exhibition in the Hospital de los Venerables, the home of the Foundation.

Madrid, 10 September 2015. Miguel Zugaza, director of the Prado Museum, and Anabel Morillo, director general of the Focus-Abengoa Foundation, accompanied by Javier Portús, the curator of the museum's Murillo collection and María Álvarez, the restorer of the work, this morning presented to the media the special installation of the work *San Pedro penitente de los Venerables*, owned by Abengoa, in room 17 of the Villanueva building.

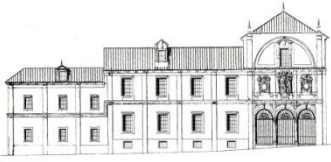
The work –painted for Justino de Neve, who bequeathed it to the Hospital de los Venerables in 1685– will go on temporary display in the Prado Museum alongside other paintings by the Sevillian artist before its definitive return to the Hospital de los Venerables, the headquarters of the Focus-Abengoa Foundation

From tomorrow 11 September, until 17 January, visitors to the Prado Museum will be able to see this exceptionally valuable piece by Murillo in room 17 of the Villanueva building. The work belonging to Abengoa has been given to the Focus-Abengoa Foundation to be incorporated in the permanent collection of the Velázquez Centre, housed in the Hospital de los Venerables. After its recovery in the United Kingdom, the painting was brought to the Prado to undergo a technical study and cleaning, which has restored the composition originally envisaged by the artist and provided insights into Murillo's technical and stylistic resources.

*San Pedro penitente de los Venerables* was the property of Justino de Neve, one of the painter's most scholarly and expert patrons, and who three years ago was the subject of an exhibition organised by the Prado, the Focus-Abengoa Foundation and the Dulwich Picture Gallery in London. It was bequeathed in his will (1685) to the Baroque building of the Hospital de los Venerables in Seville, the home of the Focus-Abengoa Foundation, where it will return after its stay in the Prado, marking the return of this masterpiece of Sevillian art.

The Hospital church still has the altarpiece in which the work was displayed from at least 1701 until it was confiscated during the Peninsular War by Marshal Soult, in whose collection it remained until his death in 1851, when it went on to form part of several private collections.

*San Pedro penitente de los Venerables* is based on a composition by Ribera and features a subject that was very popular during the Spanish Golden Age: the retreat and



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repentance of Saint Peter, who is seen wringing his hands and directing a tearful gaze to heaven.

**The restoration**

The Abengoa painting was in a good state of conservation when it arrived at the Prado, but was dark, cloudy and lacking in volume.

The build-up of varnishes and earlier restorations had muddied the work and made it difficult to clearly see the spaces intended to be occupied by each part of the composition in the original design. Despite its apparently good condition, it lacked the necessary references of space and depth.

Treatments were applied to consolidate the painting so as to avoid any possible detachment or lifting of the craquelure, and erase the effects of previous restorations that masked the original painting. Having removed the varnishes and repaintings, the work now reveals Murillo's technical and stylistic virtuosity from his later period. The restoration work was aided by technical and chemical analyses which also served to shed light on the artist's creative process and technique.

In this work, uniformly lit but with marked contrasts, Murillo first plots the cloudscape and the background on the mid-tone greyish base layer. He then frames the figure in the space he has reserved for it, in the shadow of the grotto, using more pronounced impasto brushstrokes to make it stand out from the background.

The brushwork is very versatile and is the most notable feature of this style. The flesh tones are modelled with a loaded brush, where the imprint of the brush can be plainly seen. Ethereal effects in the landscape are achieved with more diluted pigment, and the transparency of the background is produced by diluting the paint as much as possible. The final touches are added with dry brushstrokes to highlight the main points of light.

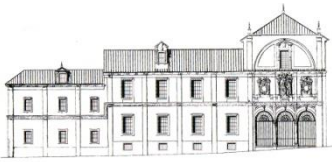
Murillo worked in layers, laying light tones over dark to outline the contours. The modelling of the face and hands has more impasto than the cloak, which itself is more impastoed than the background. The effect of darkness in the grotto is achieved with very even and barely discernible brushwork.

This restoration has exposed the work's original message once again, and revealed the way the artist communicates through the pictorial medium.

The frame was also restored and although it is not the original conserved on the altar of the Hospital de los Venerables, it is a magnificent piece in the French First Empire style, probably dating from the time the painting first arrived in France after its removal by Napoleon's army.

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### **Focus-Abengoa Foundation**

The Focus-Abengoa Foundation was created in 1982 as a result of the cultural work begun in 1972 by Abengoa with the publication of the works *Temas Sevillanos* (Themes of Seville) and *Iconografía de Sevilla* (Iconography of Seville). A collection of documents, books and engravings on the Kingdom of Seville and by Sevillian authors was created during the same period. This initial cultural work showed Abengoa's directors the importance of the company's involvement in activities that directly benefit society, beyond the firm's core technology work, which led to the creation of the Seville Cultural Fund Foundation. The Hospital de los Venerables, a 17th century monument and the headquarters of the Focus-Abengoa Foundation in Seville, has housed the Diego Velázquez Research Centre, a leading institution for studying and disseminating the Baroque era and the Sevillian period of this universally renowned artist, since the acquisition of Velázquez's "Santa Rufina" by the Foundation in 2007. The focus on this crucial era of the Golden Age is complemented with the legacy from Professor Alfonso E. Pérez Sánchez, bequeathed to the Foundation in 2011. It comprises his library, photo library, personal archive and art collection and is being catalogued to help create a library specialising in the art and culture of the Baroque period. <http://focus.abengoa.es/>

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