

# Fitzwilliam Museum bids to acquire weeping Virgin

Acquisition appeal for:

*The Virgin of Sorrows (Mater Dolorosa)*, about 1670-5

Pedro de Mena (1628-1688)

Polychrome wood, human hair & glass

33.6 x 31.0 x 19.8 cm

A remarkably realistic painted wood bust of the *Mater Dolorosa* (*Virgin of Sorrows*) by Pedro de Mena (1628-1688), one of the most celebrated sculptors of the Spanish Golden Age, has gone on display at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge as part of an appeal to acquire the sculpture.

Mesmerisingly beautiful and just under life size at 33.6cm tall, the *Virgin of Sorrows*' gently furrowed brows, natural flesh tones, glass eyes and teardrops and eyelashes made from human hair, still elicit a powerful response from the viewer 350 years after it was made. It was most likely created for the private chapel, study or bedchamber of a devout patron, and would almost certainly have been protected under a glass dome and originally paired with a similarly-sized bust of the *Ecce Homo* (Christ as the *Man of Sorrows*).



*The Virgin of Sorrows (Mater Dolorosa)*,  
about 1670-5  
Pedro de Mena (1628-1688)

The *Virgin of Sorrows* is on show in the Museum's Spanish & Flemish Gallery, alongside other masterpieces by contemporary Baroque sculptors and painters. The Fitzwilliam Museum has already raised a substantial amount towards the work (including £30,000 from the Art Fund and £10,000 from The Henry Moore Foundation) but needs to secure a further £85,000 by the end of September 2014 in order to acquire the remarkable bust.

The Spanish Golden Age, early 16th to late 17th century, was a period of incredible artistic and economic output for Spain, seeing the nation rise to one of the greatest empires the world has ever seen. From the conquest of the New World, to the writing of *Don Quixote* by Miguel de Cervantes, this period changed the course of world politics and culture. The Fitzwilliam Museum has a small collection of Spanish art, including two works by Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, but the more emotive Catholic works, exemplified by painted wood sculpture are extremely rare in British collections. Taste and religion played their part in this: indeed, most of de Mena's sculptures remain in the churches, monasteries and convents for which they were made.

The Spanish sculptor Pedro de Mena (1628-1688) was taught the art of wood carving by his father, Alonso de Mena (1587-1646), a well-regarded sculptor of traditional religious images in Granada. Following his father's death, the eighteen-year-old Pedro took over the workshop and was joined by established artist Alonso Cano (1601-1667), who taught him how to realistically paint sculpture. Cano also encouraged Mena to enhance the naturalism of his sculptures by including additional elements, such as eyes and tears made from glass, and eyelashes from human hair. As such, Mena's statues and busts have a remarkable lifelike quality, which can be unnerving to the 21st century viewer. Mena left Granada in 1658 and spent the rest of his career in Málaga, becoming increasingly well regarded with prestigious patrons from church and state. Mena was known for his intense faith and was elected by the Inquisition in both Granada and Málaga as a censor of images.

Tim Knox, Director of the Fitzwilliam Museum said: "The thing about this bust is that it is not one of those lugubrious virgins with rolling eyes that one associates with Spanish religious art. Here instead is a strikingly simple, and arrestingly intense, portrait of a beautiful young woman - an Andalusian peasant girl perhaps? - depicted in that moment of hopeless anguish for the humiliation and loss of her only Son. Pedro de Mena's *Mater Dolorosa* would be a wonderful addition to our collection."

You can give online by visiting [www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk](http://www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk), or please contact Sue Rhodes, Development Officer, [sr295@cam.ac.uk](mailto:sr295@cam.ac.uk), 01223 332939.

Other Spanish Golden Age initiatives within the University of Cambridge include an ongoing funding campaign to establish a postgraduate scholarship post in the period at Clare College. The campaign is in the memory of Dr Anthony Close who was a member of the University's department of Spanish & Portuguese, and one of the world's leading experts on Cervantes, and his masterpiece, Don Quixote.  
- Ends -

**For further information and images contact the Press Office:**  
01223 332941 | [press@fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk](mailto:press@fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk)

#### Notes to editors:

The Fitzwilliam Museum, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RB  
FREE ADMISSION

OPEN: Tuesday - Saturday: 10.00 - 17.00  
Sundays and Bank Holiday Mondays: 12.00 - 17.00  
CLOSED: 24-26 & 31 December, 1 January and Good Friday.

**Founded in 1816 the Fitzwilliam Museum** is the principal museum of the University of Cambridge and lead partner for the University of Cambridge Museums (UCM) Major Partner Museum programme, funded by The Arts Council. The Fitzwilliam's collections explore world history and art from antiquity to the present day. It houses over half a million objects from ancient Egyptian, Greek and Roman artefacts, to medieval illuminated manuscripts, masterpiece paintings from the Renaissance to the 21st century, world class prints and drawings, and outstanding collections of applied arts, ceramics, coins, and Asian arts. The Fitzwilliam presents a wide ranging public programme of major exhibitions, events and education activities, and is an internationally recognised institute of learning, research and conservation.  
[www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk](http://www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk)

**The Art Fund** is the national fundraising charity for art, helping museums to buy and show great art for everyone. Over the past 5 years we've given over £26m to help museums and galleries acquire works of art for their collections and placed hundreds of gifts and bequests, from ancient sculpture and treasure hoards to Old Master paintings and contemporary commissions, with 25% of grants going towards works by living artists. We also help museums share their collections with wider audiences through supporting a range of tours and exhibitions, including the national tour of the Artist Rooms collection and the 2014 tour of Jeremy Deller's English Magic, the British Council commission for the 2013 Venice Biennale. Our support for museums extends to the Art Guide app - the comprehensive guide to seeing art across the UK, promoting a network of nearly 700 museums and galleries throughout the country, and the £100,000 Art Fund Prize for Museum of the Year - an annual celebration of the best of UK museums, won in 2014 by Yorkshire Sculpture Park in Wakefield. We are independently funded, the majority of our income coming from over 105,000 members who, through the National Art Pass, enjoy free entry to over 220 museums, galleries and historic houses across the UK, as well as 50% off entry to major exhibitions.

Find out more about the Art Fund and the National Art Pass at [www.artfund.org](http://www.artfund.org).  
Please contact Madeline Adeane, the Press Relations Manager, on 020 7225 4804 or [madeane@artfund.org](mailto:madeane@artfund.org)