



1. Object Information

Artist / Maker (Dates):	Quentin Metsys (Leuven 1465 or 1466 – Kiel, nr. Antwerp 1530)
Nationality / Culture:	Netherlandish
Title / Object:	<i>Christ as the Man of Sorrows</i>
Date:	1520-30
Medium:	Oil on panel
Dimensions:	19 ½ x 14 ½ in. (49.5 x 37 cm)
Signed, Marked, or Inscribed:	None; various later inscriptions in chalk (verso)
Country of Manufacture:	Belgium
Present Location:	J. Paul Getty Museum, L.2018.78

Facebook Live event with paintings curator Anne Woollett and conservator Ulrich Birkmaier discussing Quentin Metsys' painting "Christ as the Man of Sorrows" just before it goes on public view: <https://www.facebook.com/gettymuseum/videos/468280427256206/>

2. Description:

Metsys depicts Christ as haggard and sorrowful, weeping copiously. He wears the Crown of Thorns; its vicious spines pierce his forehead and his right eyebrow and extend menacingly outwards, accentuated by the brilliant golden radiance behind him. Christ's wavy brown locks fall to his shoulders and onto his cloak, once a "shot" reddish-purple color and now bluish in tonality. Blood from his wounds runs through his hair, down the neckline of his cloak and beneath the jeweled gold clasp. His bare chest is flecked with numerous small bloody gashes. Christ raises his thin left arm to reveal his wrist bound with rope. Metsys's Christ is a dynamic figure who looms large within the confines of the composition. He tilts his head, gaze unfocused and mouth slightly ajar revealing his teeth. One side of his cloak flies back as he gestures subtly yet meaningfully downward to the altar below. The tips of his lower fingers may have continued onto the original engaged frame.

Old Testament verses (the Lamentations of Jeremiah 1:12, for instance) and Gospel accounts, notably the books of Matthew (27:29-31), Mark (15:16-20) and John (19:1-6), refer to Christ's Passion and describe his torment by Pontius Pilate's soldiers: wrists tied, he was scourged, wrapped in a "royal" purple cloak, a crown of plaited thorns forced down upon his head, and mocked: "Hail, King of the Jews." With antecedents in Byzantine and thirteenth-century Italian painting, and in conjunction with the religious movement known as the Modern Devotion (*Devotio Moderna*), the subject of Christ alone, wearing the emblems of kingship and weeping for humanity, coalesced into a powerful pictorial form in the early fifteenth-century Netherlands. Authors such as Thomas à Kempis stressed the importance of empathizing with the Passion of Christ and his suffering during meditation. Panel painters, notably Dieric Bouts (ca. 1415-1455) and his son Albrecht (ca. 1452-1459) in Leuven, the university town in which Quentin Metsys trained, devised popular images as aids to personal devotion that imply the viewer's physical proximity to Christ and graphically detail his suffering. The focus on physical torment and anguish – emphasized by flowing tears – distinguishes the theme of Christ as the Man of Sorrows from related subjects, such as the Holy Face (the living likeness of Christ preserved as it was pressed onto Veronica's veil), and Christ as Salvator Mundi, usually showing Christ's unmarred features, holding an orb, right hand raised in blessing.

Christ as the Man of Sorrows is a major recent discovery and spectacular addition to the oeuvre of Quentin Metsys, the most eminent history painter in Antwerp during the first third of the sixteenth century. The appearance of this panel expands the artist's diverse oeuvre with a hitherto unrecorded composition. With a powerful visual impact far exceeding its scale, it attests to Metsys's unrivaled ability to infuse the familiar and profoundly moving subject of the suffering Christ with a startling intensity and presence. Metsys's acquaintance with the Bouts mode, which accentuates the brutality of Christ's torment with ruthlessly delineated thorns, gruesome wounds and reddened eyes, is evident from his unsparing description of the thorns, particularly those lodged deeply in Christ's forehead. In *Christ as the Man of Sorrows*, Metsys combined late medieval specificity - still meaningful in the early sixteenth century - with a profound humanity appropriate to the sensibilities of his Antwerp patrons in the 1520s. In contrast to earlier, more hieratic images, *Christ as Man of Sorrows* was intended to elicit compassion from his viewers engaged with the emulation of Christ and his humanity as espoused by contemporary humanists, notably Metsys's friend, Erasmus of Rotterdam.

In the Netherlands, Christ as the Man of Sorrows and related subjects, such as the Salvator Mundi, appeared in various configurations and were often paired with an image of the sorrowing Virgin or the Virgin in prayer, respectively. Here, a *barbe* (spur) along the outside curve of the radiance where the paint layers joined the original engaged molding (removed long ago)

indicates the image was arched at the top. The upper corners of the panel, likely covered by the original frame, were subsequently painted to create a more standard rectangular image. The arched format, a typical configuration for single-figure devotional images in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth-century Netherlands, served to focus the viewer's attention on the head of Christ. *Christ as the Man of Sorrows* may once have been part of an altarpiece as half of a folding (hinged) diptych with a painting of the weeping Virgin as the Mater Dolorosa, or perhaps as a separate panel with the sorrowing Virgin as a pendant. Alternatively, given its scale, *Christ as the Man of Sorrows* may have been painted as an autonomous devotional image which, at the request of the patron, could have been combined with a Mater Dolorosa.

3. Recommendation:

Both arresting and moving, *Christ as the Man of Sorrows* is an extraordinarily compelling image. It exemplifies the sophisticated devotional image that made Quentin Metsys famous and the city of Antwerp renowned as a center of painting in the sixteenth century. As a major discovery that enlarges the oeuvre of the artist, *Christ as the Man of Sorrows* is a worthy addition to the Getty's very small (and generally modest in quality) collection of sixteenth-century Flemish paintings. *Christ as the Man of Sorrows* addresses a significant area of weakness in the paintings collection: outstanding sixteenth-century Northern paintings, which have been rare and difficult to obtain in recent years. Together with Jan Gossaert's *Francisco de los Cobos y Molina* (ca. 1530-32; 88.PB.43), Metsys's captivating panel would provide a much-needed Renaissance voice to the current display, which is particularly strong in fifteenth-century works. This painting pays homage to the iconic Netherlandish painters of the past while representing relatable human pathos of the 1520s. Beautifully executed and striking, it would become one of the most memorable paintings in the North pavilion. Moreover, Metsys's *Christ as the Man of Sorrows* would provide a vivid, engaging treatment of a popular and widespread subject ca. 1500 in both Northern Europe and Italy which is currently absent from the paintings collection as a whole. With its vivid portrayal of suffering and engaging narrative, this panel would also link the early Netherlandish and Baroque areas of the collection, notably Dieric Bouts (*The Annunciation*, ca. 1450-55; 85.PA.24) and the Rogier van der Weyden circle (*The Deposition*, about 1490, 79.PB.20), with the explicit devotional imagery of the Counter Reformation (Peter Paul Rubens, *The Entombment*, ca. 1612; 93.PA.9).

Christ as the Man of Sorrows would also be a versatile addition to the collection. While it would undoubtedly become a highlight of gallery N203, this impressive panel would also represent the Flemish reception of Italian Renaissance ideas if displayed in gallery N204 among Italian paintings 1480 to 1550, for example, and in any future permanent collection array combining northern and Italian Renaissance works in the North Pavilion. A particularly interesting juxtaposition would be with Correggio's contemporaneous *Head of Christ* (ca. 1525-30; 94.PB.74), with which it shares a powerful intensity.

The painting under consideration relates to themes and iconography found in medieval manuscripts (particularly Flemish artists such as the Master of James IV of Scotland and Simon Bening) and would be suitable for display in exhibitions presented in N105 and N106.

Christ as the Man of Sorrows would be the first work by the eminent Antwerp painter Quentin Metsys to enter the Getty Museum's collection and the only autograph painting by the master in Southern California. In addition to the *Virgin in Adoration* (Workshop of Quentin Metsys, after 1507; Los Angeles County Museum of Art), the Norton Simon Museum collection includes a major late work by Quentin's son Jan Massys (*Susanna and the Elders*, 1564; M.2005.2.P).

4. Artist and Style:

Quentin Metsys (variously spelled Massys, Matsys, Metsijs; Quinten) (1465 or 1466 – 1530) was the foremost history painter in the bustling port city of Antwerp (Southern Netherlands) at the beginning of the sixteenth century. His sophisticated use of color, representation of emotion and expression, and introduction of new types of portraiture and secular subjects, transformed Flemish painting and Antwerp's reputation as a center of artistic innovation.

Metsys was born in Leuven (Louvain), a prosperous town east of Brussels. The son of a blacksmith from Antwerp, he may initially have trained in his father's profession. He remained associated with metalwork through his early years, designing portrait medals, including the influential commemorative medal of the humanist scholar Desiderius Erasmus (1519). Metsys moved to Antwerp, which had assumed the mantle of economic powerhouse from Bruges in the late fifteenth century, and joined the Guild of Saint Luke in 1491. His vibrant palette and lively figural style appealed to the tastes of the diverse and wealthy merchant community, and his intense, engaging style offered a more viable (and affordable) alternative to the traditional sculpted wood altarpieces commissioned for corporate altars in the city's many churches. Metsys's *Holy Kindred* triptych (1509; Brussels, Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts) features an array of beautifully rendered heads, as well as splendid fabrics and a profusion of gold details. His fame was secured with the monumental *Saint John* triptych (1508-11; Antwerp, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten) for the Joiners Guild altar in Antwerp's Onze-Lieve-Vrouwekerk, in which the piteous central scene of lamentation is set in an extensive rocky landscape and flanked by wing panels portraying vivid, crowded interior scenes.

In response to the new opportunities offered by Antwerp's burgeoning art market, Metsys devised successful compositional types that modernized the native pictorial traditions of Jan van Eyck, Hugo van der Goes, Dieric Bouts and Rogier van der Weyden. His *Virgin and Child Enthroned* (1525-30; The Hague, Mauritshuis) and *Virgin and Child with Saint Elizabeth and Saint John the Baptist* (1520-25; Williamstown, Clark Art Institute) exude heightened tenderness between mother and son. In addition, he popularized secular themes with lively new interpretations, such as the allegorical *Moneylender and his Wife* (1514; Paris, Musée du Louvre) and *The Ill-Matched Lovers* (1520-25; Washington, D.C., National Gallery of Art). Along with attentiveness to the Northern tradition, Metsys was receptive to and experimented with Italian influences. He incorporated sophisticated modeling of flesh similar indebted to Leonardesque sfumato, particularly in large-scale figures from the 1520s. Metsys's fascination with grotesque portraits is evident from *The Ugly Duchess* (1513; London, National Gallery) based on a famous Leonardo drawing (Queen Elizabeth II), and he injected allegorical subjects with biting satire (*The Tax Collectors*, 1525-28; Vaduz, Liechtenstein Princely Collections). Metsys brought his unique blend of Flemish and Italianate elements to other familiar subjects, notably the magnificent, claustrophobic *Adoration of the Magi* (1526; New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art), a prime example of the high-style mode of painting termed Antwerp Mannerism.

A lively character, Metsys was a member of the humanist community of Antwerp. His portraits attest to his close connections with the intellectual elite, notably city secretary Pieter Gillis and Erasmus, for whom he created paired portraits as their gift to Sir Thomas More in England. The German painter Albrecht Dürer reported meeting "Master Quentin" during his 1520 visit to the city. Antwerp's bustling art market offered new opportunities for artists, and from about 1520, painters began to specialize in particular genres and combine their efforts in a single painting.

Among Metsys's most significant contributions to Flemish painting was his collaboration with the outstanding landscape painter Joachim Patinir. Their joint *Temptations of Saint Anthony Abbot* (1520-24; Madrid, Museo del Prado), acquired by Philip II of Spain in 1566, was the forerunner to the widespread artistic practice of painting in collaboration in Antwerp and throughout the Southern Netherlands.

Famous and wealthy during his own life time, Metsys's renown expanded considerably after his death in 1530. His works were prized by the city and its artists in the later sixteenth century and protected during the religious upheavals from 1566 onwards. His stature as the "father" of Antwerp painting was forged through poems of praise, in which the legend of his supposed transformation from blacksmith to painter for the love of a young woman who preferred the quieter practice of painting formed the basis of a cult of personality in the seventeenth century involving leading painters, notably Peter Paul Rubens, and collectors.

5. Relevant Relationships:

A panel from the Metsys workshop (Munich, Alte Pinakothek, inv. 656; oil on panel, 36.8 x 26.5 cm (14.4 x 10.4 in)) shows a similar head of Christ, but without hands, wearing the Crown of Thorns and a cloak with a decorated edge against a plain (gold?) background. The crisp linearity of the forms suggests it repeats an earlier composition executed ca. 1500-1510. Slightly smaller than the present painting, it entered the collections of the Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen in 1799 from the Mannheim Galerie.

Unknown before its discovery in the Von der Leyen-Hohengeroldseck collection in 2016, the painting under consideration extracts and focuses upon one of Metsys's most moving portrayals of suffering: Christ tormented by soldiers. He explored the theme in large, narrative scenes, in which various grotesque, caricatured soldiers are pressed close to the picture plane. (*Ecce Homo*, 1491-1510, Tournai, Cathedral; *Ecce Homo* 1514/17, wing of a Passion triptych, Coimbra, Museo Nacional de Machado de Castro; *Ecce Homo*, 1518-20, Madrid, Museo del Prado). The present work closely resembles the figure of Christ at the center of the *Ecce Homo* in Venice (1520; Palazzo Ducale). They share similar elongated bony noses, deep-set eyes and angled heads. The deep emotion and refined execution, along with delicacy of the brushwork, misled early cataloguers of *Christ as the Man of Sorrows*, who ascribed the image to a much earlier Netherlandish master, Rogier van der Weyden (1399/1400-1464). However, the present work, in far better condition than the Venetian *Ecce Homo*, retains Metsys's delicate handling and fine details, such as the liquid tears, and shading in the face. The latter characteristic reveals Metsys's response to the soft sfumato modelling of Leonardo da Vinci.

This is Metsys's only known devotional treatment of the subject of Christ as the Man of Sorrows. Metsys painted related themes: Christ as Savior, paired with Virgin and Prayer (1529; Museo del Prado), in which Christ turns and raises his right hand in blessing, and Christ as Savior and Virgin at Prayer in which he appears bust length and presented frontally with a scepter (Antwerp, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten).