

2019

Saint Peter and Saint Paul

EL GRECO

From the State Hermitage Museum
in Saint Petersburg

RHINOCEROS™

Established in Roma by Alda Fendi

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The show is the second event in a three-year collaboration between the Fondazione Alda Fendi - Esperimenti and the famous Russian museum. A prestigious agreement arising from a desire to increase cultural dealings between Italy and Russia, through the exhibition of masterpieces from the State Hermitage Museum in Saint Petersburg.

After the great success of the previous year, when the exhibition of Michelangelo's *Crouching Boy* attracted over 22,000 visitors, the 2019 choice is a genuine tribute to the city of Rome.

The subjects of the masterpiece - *Saint Peter* and *Saint Paul* - are the patron saints of the Italian capital, and their showing at the palazzo rhinoceros established them as "tutelary deities" of the space and, by extension, the city of Rome.

The exhibition, promoted by the Fondazione Alda Fendi - Esperimenti and the State Hermitage Museum, and organized by Il Cigno GG Edizioni in collaboration con Ermitage Italia and Villaggio Globale International, is akin in ideal terms to the El Greco retrospective held at the Grand Palais in Paris.

THE WORK

Having entered the collections of the museum on the banks of the Neva in Saint Petersburg in 1911, a gift from Pëtr Pavlovič Durnovo, governor-general of Moscow during the Russian Revolution of 1905, the work is usually on display in the museum's room of Spanish masterpieces, next to one of the *Skylight Halls* characterizing the so-called New Hermitage built between 1839 and 1851.

The work is emblematic of the by-then fully mature style of El Greco, who "went down in the history of painting as the greatest sixteenth-century Spanish artist and who became", as the exhibition curator Svyatoslav Savvateev writes in an essay for the catalogue published by Cigno GG Edizioni, "one of the best-known and celebrated artists in the whole of European art history".

AND THE ARTIST

Domenico Theotokopoulos, known as El Greco, was born in Crete in 1541. He was one of the most innovative painters of his age, with a style characterized by unusual and innovative choices of colour, elongated figures and broad brushstrokes. He began as an icon painter in the Byzantine tradition, before completing his training in Venice, perhaps under Titian, and in Rome. He moved to Spain in 1576, where he produced highly original works between Toledo and the Escorial complex in Madrid.

His works give expression to a tormented and tragic style, a clash of realistic actuality and visionary evocation, which combine and rework the colour of Titian, the luminism of Tintoretto and elements from Correggio, Parmigianino, Raphael and Dürer. The exceptional painting on loan to the Fondazione Alda Fendi - Esperimenti from the Hermitage is also a deeply and spiritually intense work, probably produced by the artist while he was working in Toledo between 1587 and 1592.



The two apostles are portrayed together, in keeping with a well-established custom, inside a dark space (something fairly exceptional in the painter's work) and with their own traditional iconography: Peter with the keys to the kingdom of Heaven and Paul with an open book in his hands, a reference to his letters to the first Christian communities.

Paul, determined and dishevelled, is in the foreground, making a firm gesture with his left hand, the index finger pointing to a volume; the apostle Peter is in a serene, upright position, with a contemplative yet at the same time penetrating and reflective gaze. He is looking in the same direction as Paul, giving the composition unity and expressive purpose, as is also suggested by the dynamics of the right hands of the two saints, which seem to be moving towards each other to give life to an inseparable whole.

Two different but united figures; apparently in contrast due to their different temperaments and characters but standing alongside each other to highlight the “duality of the principles of the Apostles”.

At the height of the Spanish Empire, El Greco stood as one of the great painters of the Golden Age, the period of artistic and cultural splendour running from the birth of the empire to the middle of the seventeenth century.

The originality of his artistic synthesis makes El Greco the great precursor of early modernism and the noble father of new generations of artists, as he is defined by the German art historian Julius Meier-Graefe.

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