



# El Greco: Ambition and Defiance



The Art Institute of Chicago exhibits over 55 works by El Greco from across the world.

The exhibition brings the investigation of El Greco's career full circle with one of his very last paintings, *The Adoration of the Shepherds*. This altarpiece was created for his own tomb in Santo Domingo el Antiguo. This was the same church that housed his first great altarpiece and the same city that the preacher and poet Hortensio Félix Paravicino said in his eulogy to the artist, "gave him his brushes."

## ABOUT EL GRECO

Born in Crete as Domenikos Theotokopoulos (1541–1614), El Greco trained in the traditional manner of Byzantine icon painting. He moved to Venice in 1567 to learn a new artistic approach, absorbing developments in Venetian Renaissance painting through the lens of artists such as Titian and Tintoretto. The works El Greco painted during his time in Venice, however, reveal both his embrace of and struggles to fully adapt to this manner of painting.

Following this transformative period, El Greco went to Rome, probably in an attempt to attract patronage within the papal circle. There his acceptance into the elevated circle of Cardinal Alessandro Farnese brought a close association with the painter Giulio Clovio and the erudite historian and collector Fulvio Orsini. El Greco's portraits, allegories, and religious paintings between 1570 and 1577 reflect these relationships as well as his complicated engagement with Michelangelo and other artistic luminaries of the 16th century.

VISUAL ARTS  
CHICAGO

Sat, March 07–  
Mon, October 19, 2020

### Venue

Art Institute of Chicago, 111 S  
Michigan Ave, Chicago, IL 60603  
[View map](#)

### Admission

[Buy tickets](#). Member previews on Thursday, March 5 and Friday, March 6, from 10.30 am to 8 pm. Member lecture on Thursday, March 5, from 1 pm to 2 pm; Rebecca Long, Patrick G. and Shirley W. Ryan, Associate Curator of European Painting and Sculpture, will discuss the exhibition and explore how the artist's style changed throughout his career

### More information

[Art Institute of Chicago](#)

### Credits

Presented by the Art Institute of Chicago, the Réunion des musées nationaux-Grand Palais, Paris and the Musée du Louvre. Image: *The Adoration of the Shepherds*



With no major commissions in Rome, El Greco moved on to Spain in 1577. He quickly earned a major commission for the altarpiece for the Church of Santo Domingo el Antiguo in Toledo, the result being the monumental *The Assumption of the Virgin* (1577/79). Of a scale and format that he had never previously attempted, *The Assumption* became a showpiece for the artist as he attempted to mold a new career for himself in Spain.

Despite this success, El Greco was unable to secure commissions from the powerful authorities of Toledo or from the most consequential of artistic patrons, King Philip II. He turned instead to carving out a private clientele, finding enthusiastic patronage among the local intelligentsia and developing a flourishing career as a portraitist. Alongside paintings of theologians, writers, and attorneys, he was commissioned to decorate a series of private altars and family chapels.

The Arts Institute reopens on July 30 with new hours and free admission for IL residents July 30–Aug 3. [Learn more.](#)