

# El Greco

Domenikos Theotopoulos

1541-1614

## Biographical information

- Born on the Greek Island of Crete into a prosperous family. El Greco was well educated and gained a reputation as a scholar and writer.
- First art instruction was believed to have come from the local monks.
- Studied under Venetian masters in Venice Italy, later with Michelangelo and Raphael in Rome. Also studied with Titan and associated with great painters such as Tintoretto.
- Went to Toledo, Spain in 1577 where he remained for the rest of his life.
- Had a proud temperament and thought of himself as an artist and philosopher.
- Gained a reputation for being arrogant and often quarrelsome. He loved to show his superiority to the Spanish. He felt that since he was Greek, he was a descendant of the greatest of the ancient races.
- The King of Spain disliked El Greco and he was not popular with the people who refused to call him by his Greek name, but called him “El Greco”, or “The Greek” as a constant reminder that he was not one of them.
- El Greco felt that the Spanish were inferior to the Italians and the Italians were inferior to the Greeks.
- Sold his paintings for very high prices and lived well. The Catholic Church was one of his main customers.
- Led a lavish lifestyle, but had financial difficulties towards the end of his life.
- Died in Toledo on April 7<sup>th</sup> 1614. After his death, his paintings were forgotten until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when they were rediscovered.

## Style

- El Greco had a very personalized style.
- He enjoyed painting people and was well trained in drawing and painting figures. He had a good understanding of anatomy.
- Did not draw figures the way they appeared but deliberately chose to distort certain body parts and elongated the figure.
- His paintings had a mystical quality.
- Often disregarded natural color and manipulated light and dark to create tension in his paintings.

## Mannerism

- El Greco painted in the Mannerist style.
- A European art movement and style that developed between 1520-1600. It was a style that rejected the calm balance of the High Renaissance in favor of emotion and distortion. Works of art done in this style reflect the tension that existed in Europe at this time in history.

