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Galería de Arte

*Soraya Cartategui*

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Dear friends,

In this month of December the gallery presents this wonderful Adoration of the Magi, made by the outstanding 17th-century Dutch painter, Gerrit Pietersz Sweelinck.

Best wishes,  
Soraya Cartategui

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**Gerrit Pietersz Sweelinck**

(Amsterdam 1566 – 1612)

*“Adoration of the Magi”*

Oil on copper

65,7 x 50,9 cm. (25,86 x 20,03 in.)

1600 ca.

Gerrit Pietersz Sweelinck was an important Dutch Golden Age painter. Brother of

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his early years he studied in Amsterdam in the workshop of the glass painter, Jacob Lenartz and around 1588-1591 he attended the workshop of Cornelis Cornelisz van Haarlem, whose influence is very present in his drawings.

Between 1594-95 he moved to live in Antwerp for a short period of time, as he made a trip to Rome where he would be greatly influenced by the Italian painters of that time. Back in Amsterdam, in 1600 he became Pieter Lastman's master.

The painter and draftsman Pietersz Sweelinck was also interested during his artistic career in the technique of etching, we find five examples dated 1593, where a northern Mannerist style prevails, with elongated and powerful figures.

Most of his known works are of a religious nature, although we also find some examples of classical mythology and history, many of them are drawings, in which the painter was very prolific, similar to those made by Abraham Bloemaert.



Our work represents a religious scene, the Adoration of the Magi, recounted in chapter two of the Gospel of St. Matthew. Born the baby Jesus, magicians from the East went to Jerusalem guided by the star of Bethlehem, to worship the little newborn. Each of the Magi offered a gift to the child, these offerings had a very important meaning.

In the foreground, we can see the main scene of the play, just the moment in which the Magi give their gifts to the baby Jesus. We see how the Virgin Mary appears sitting with the Child in her arms, dressed in white robe and her head

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offerings that the Kings carry. The Virgin appears dressed in a white robe as a symbol of light, eternity and the virgin character of Mary; The mantle, cobalt blue, symbolizes the color of the sky and represents Mary as Queen of the Universe.

To his left, we find José, dressed in a humble brown robe and a reddish robe that is attached to the chest helped by his right hand. For of his posture, taking off the hat he holds with his left hand, it seems that he is welcoming the three Wise Men. It appears in the background, behind the Virgin and Child, as a sign that he is only the symbolic father of Jesus, thus affirming the virginity of Mary and the divinity of the newborn.



Behind the couple, we see the ox represented. According to custom, the mule would represent the humblest animal of creation and the ox, has the mission of keeping the cradle of the baby Jesus warm with his breath.

To the right of the composition, we find the three Wise Men. First, King Melchior appears, kneeling in front of the boy, offering him a small chest containing gold. Gold represents the royalty of the newborn. According to legend, King Melchior of Arabia, took the gold, thus providing funds for Mary and Joseph, who had to flee with the baby to Egypt, to escape the death of all children under two, by order of Herod.



With pink robes, we find King Baltasar, king of Saga near present-day Yemen. This



the upper part made of mother of pearl. Incense in ancient times became one of the most important luxury items of commerce in the Mediterranean. It represents the role of Jesus as High Priest and his divinity as Son of God.

Finally, King Gaspar, king of Tarsus in Turkey, brings the Child Jesus myrrh, which he carries in a small chest that he protects with his two hands, waiting for his turn to worship the little one. Myrrh is used as an important commercial material used to make perfumes, medicines and embalming. It represents the humanity of Jesus and, because it is used for Medicine, its role as the great Physician.



Regarding the background, we see that the author represents a city, where we can find several architectures and high towers. All citizens approach to observe the great event. The sky, of grayish color, very typical within the seventeenth-century Dutch painting shows us a halo of light

that brings the star of Bethlehem that symbolizes the birth of the Child Jesus, also for Christians it represents light, hope and faith that guides their lives as believers.

In conclusion, we see a composition full of characters that almost completely completes the entire surface of the copper with its typical elongated and powerful figures of firm invoice, leaving only a small clearing in the sky that appears cloudy. All this helps to bring strength to the work, especially when it comes to capturing the essence of the religious scene that is taking place.

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#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

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## PROVENANCE

- Private collection, France

## MUSEUMS

There are works by Gerrit Pietersz Sweelinck in the collections of museums in the following cities, among others: National Gallery of Art, London (England) - Municipal Museum, The Hague (Holland) - Amsterdam Museum, Amsterdam (Netherlands) - Boijmans Van Museum Beuningen, Rotterdam (Netherlands) - Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (Netherlands) - National Gallery, Washington (USA).

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