

A Lucretia by
Lucas Cranach the Elder
at the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum



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**BILBOKO ARTE
EDERREN MUSEOA
MUSEO DE BELLAS
ARTES DE BILBAO**

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Introduction

Lucretia [fig. 1] twists the veil with nervous fingers. Her gaze is slightly vacant, introspective even. Does she realise the cloak has fallen from her shoulders? Her hips are unlikely to stop the leather-trimmed garment, which will probably end up slithering to the floor, leaving her completely naked. But she seems to be completely intent on the dagger in her right hand, the weapon that is about to put an end to her life.

When the great 1974 Cranach exhibition was held in Basel¹, virtually nothing was known about this painting, except that it had formerly been part of a collection in Madrid and had been published by Christian Zervos in 1950². After Dieter Koepplin reproduced it in the exhibition catalogue, "um sie nicht vergessen zu Lassen"³, the owners got in contact with him. Since then, the provenance of this *Lucretia* has been investigated, and the painting acquired by the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum for its permanent collection. This essay covers historical, iconographical and technical issues concerning a masterwork Lucas Cranach the Elder (c. 1472-1553) painted in 1534 and which has been largely ignored by scholars until now.

Theme and historical context

The work portrays the classical heroine Lucretia, standing naked, shown half-length against a dark background. In this frontal composition that takes up the entire picture, the subject leans her head to the right of the painting, while her hips are slightly oriented to the left. Cranach uses this sinuous pose, with Lucretia almost imperceptibly turning on the axis of her body, to give the figure life and movement. Her left hand, which holds the transparent veil to her body, and the cloak fallen to her hips, reinforce the snapshot feel of the image. In her right hand the beautiful heroine holds the sharp dagger upwards against her body. A few drops of blood have appeared and, despite the empty, absent look in her eyes, the pain shows in her face.

Besides the fur-trimmed cloak, Lucretia wears the jewellery of a noblewoman: a necklace mounted with precious stones and a fine chain that adapts to the shape of her body to underscore her femininity. In contrast, the black hairnet holding up her blond hair is very simple.

1 Koepplin/Falk 1974-1976, pp. 664, 666, fig. 323.

2 Zervos 1950, p. 63, fig.

3 "So that it should not be forgotten". Koepplin/Falk 1974-1976, p. 666.



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1. Lucas Cranach the Elder (c. 1472-1553)
Lucretia, 1534
Oil on panel, 50.4 x 36.4 cm
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum
Inv. no. 12/79

Livy⁴ recounts the story of the suicide of the virtuous Roman noblewoman Lucretia and the myth of the foundation of the Roman Republic in his *History of Rome* (I, 57-59). As he tells it, Lucretia lived in the 6th century BC and was the beautiful and chaste wife of Collatinus. At that time King Tarquin the Proud ruled Rome, and his army was poised to take the city of Ardea. After an attack that was repulsed, the Romans laid siege to the city and, as there was little activity in the area, the princes spent their time in revelling and at banquets. During an orgy held by the King's son Sextus Tarquinius, in which Collatinus also took part, the revellers decided to compare the virtues of their respective wives. Each one praised his own wife to the skies and in their rivalry one or two of the merry-makers began to get overheated. Collatinus suggested they ride back to Rome to check on what their wives were doing while their husbands were away, as the impression produced by a surprise visit would be more eloquent than any high-flown praise. The idea was well received and the men took off for Rome. While all the other wives were having a good time at banquets and parties with their lady friends, Lucretia was the only one at home spinning wool. She was declared the winner of the contest and her husband invited the princes to his home.

Although much taken with Lucretia's industry, Sextus Tarquinius was more impressed by her beauty. A few days later, he returned to visit her without Collatinus knowing; Lucretia gave him a cordial welcome. After supper, Sextus retired for the night to a guest room. When everyone else was asleep, he made his way to Lucretia's quarters, sword in hand. There he declared his love for her, attempting to obtain her favours, alternating pleas with threats. But not even the fear of imminent death made Lucretia give in. Sextus threatened to sully her reputation by killing her and one of her slaves to make everyone think he had caught her in the act of adultery with her servant. Undone by her terror of such dishonour, Lucretia gave in to Sextus's desire.

After Sextus had left the house, she sent a messenger to her father Spurius Lucretius in Rome, urging him to come at once, and another to Ardea to alert her husband Collatinus. On their arrival, they found her crying in her quarters and she explained what had happened. Afterwards she made them promise to avenge the outrage. Father and husband gave their word and exonerated her from all blame. But then Lucretia produced a dagger and stabbed herself in the heart so that, following her example, in the future no unfaithful wife could survive such dishonour. Spurius and Collatinus spread word of what had happened throughout Rome, which led to an uprising that provoked the overthrow of the royal family and the proclamation of the Republic of Rome.

As the embodiment of virtue, chastity, faithfulness and the honour of women, Lucretia was a hugely popular subject for painters⁵, particularly in the 16th century. Cranach regularly returned to the theme. In Max J. Friedländer's and Jakob Rosenberg's 1979 catalogue of works⁶, there are some thirty-five variations of the pagan heroine set up as a model of virtue in a Christian society. Today there are roughly double that number of known versions attributed to Lucas Cranach the Elder, Lucas Cranach the Younger, their workshop and circle, imitators and copyists.

It was not merely a question of the Renaissance rediscovering the theme of Lucretia; portrayals of her flourished, which is a good reason for providing a brief explanation of the link between Livy's story and Cranach's paintings. In general, the works of Cranach in which the subjects are characters from classical legend almost always show them nude. Such paintings were interpreted according to the cultural yardstick of the age and the eroticism it legitimised. However Cranach was court painter in Wittenberg, a court that saw itself as

4 Livius 1909, pp. 72-74.

5 On this theme, see Bierende 2002; Follak 2002, on <http://kops.ub.uni-konstanz.de/volltexte/2002/914> [consulted: 30/11/2008]; Livius 1909.

6 Friedländer/Rosenberg 1979.

the antithesis of the sinful and wanton renaissance courts in Italy and the Habsburgs. Elector Frederick III implemented reforms in all the important institutions throughout his dominion and was therefore already called "the Wise" during his lifetime. This theory would therefore seem unlikely for the most Christian court in the German Empire.

At this point, it might be a good idea to revisit Edgar Bierende's explanation of the phenomenon⁷. For a start, Frederick III's reforms also affected the University of Wittenberg. Under the influence of Luther and Melancthon, new interpretative models for historical texts appeared; classical myths were no longer explained solely from the viewpoint of Christian morality, but were now considered in their original context. This led to a new appraisal of pagan literature and a positive translation which argued that the ruling classes of classical times had codified Imperial law on earth and had introduced in society values such as justice, virtue, honour and peace. The new Christian humanist interpretation of history was based on the principle of the coexistence during the same age of different cultures and religions. A kind of contrast arose between classical heroes and Biblical kings, between classical poets and Biblical prophets, and between the wise men of the classical era and virtuous Christians. One consequence of this, besides leading to a synchronisation of classical and Christian history, was that history was no longer bound theology. Exemplary behaviour came to provide models for princes, as a way of ensuring Christ found His place in history, so that He might assume moral and ethical responsibility. This therefore meant that the fact that princes and kings looked to God or distanced themselves from Him was decisive in the perpetuation or fall of kingdoms and dynasties. Perpetuation might only be guaranteed by a prince who professed Christian virtue. Contrariwise, the dynasty of a tyrant would perish, as in the example provided by Sextus Tarquinius and Lucretia⁸.

Bierende's theory provides an additional explanation for Cranach painting so many portrayals of Lucretia. What it does not do, however, is explain why he brought, specifically in the Bilbao *Lucretia*, such eroticism to the theme. The apparently contradictory norms that make the woman portrayed in this painting oscillate between a kind of provocative lewdness and rotund chastity⁹ give her an erotic attraction that may induce the spectator to think she might perhaps just share sexual intent with him. However, more careful observation reveals reproach, directed at the spectator and his impure thoughts, of a sort perhaps shared with Sextus. And self-reproach is there too, for allowing herself to be exposed to such shame. Because, behind her beauty, Lucretia is suffering, and she leaves no doubt as to the motive behind her suicide. Desperate, in her nakedness she desires nothing more than to escape from the spectator, something she can do in one way only: by killing herself¹⁰.

Cranach's portrayals of Lucretia show very little Italianate influence, most probably a result of the differences between the German and Italian cultural and historical context. While the Italian Renaissance saw the resurgence of the classics, considered the country's direct historical precedent, northern Europe had no classical tradition of this kind. There was instead a connection with the Mediaeval artistic style, seen as the direct precedent for the region's own history, and as a development of the forms of the late Middle Ages¹¹.

In Italian paintings, Lucretia is portrayed very much in the classical Roman mode, clothed in timeless style or with a classical touch. In such paintings there is a clear concern to get the body's anatomy right. In Cranach's many paintings on the theme, he too is patently interested in the nude portrayal of the human figure. But

7 Bierende 2002, pp. 171-173.

8 Ibid., pp. 184-190.

9 Follak 2002, p. 23.

10 Ibid., p. 66.

11 Bierende 2002, p. 123.

12 Friedländer/Rosenberg 1979, p. 32.



2. Lucas Cranach the Elder (c. 1472-1553)
Lucretia, c. 1518
 Oil on panel, 41.6 x 28.3 cm
 Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Kassel, Germany
 Inv. no. GK14



3. Lucas Cranach the Elder (c. 1472-1553) or the Younger (1515-1586)
Lucretia, c. 1540-1545
 Oil on panel, 76.2 x 55.4 cm
 Private collection

Lucretia's delicate grace puts us in mind rather of late Gothic forms¹². Furthermore, Cranach's Lucretias wear items of clothing or accessories typical of what German women wore in the first half of the 16th century: several, like the 1518 painting in Kassel [fig. 2], show her in slashed sleeves and a nightdress with full, voluminous elbows. The number of works in which Lucretia is shown wrapped in a fur-trimmed cloak, as in the panel from c. 1540-1545, now in a private Belgian collection [fig. 3], is also striking. This article of clothing is less ostentatious in the Bilbao version, which suggests a proximity with the 1535 Hannover *Lucretia* [fig. 4]. Anyone viewing this painting is similarly bound to wonder how a cloak could get caught like that at the hip; the mode of portrayal suggests a kind of snapshot image. Even so, as a whole, the Hannover *Lucretia* is rather more static¹³. Another work that may be usefully compared to the painting in Bilbao is a version from 1538 in the Muzeum Palac w Wilanowie in Warsaw. Here Lucretia seems to be seated, with the cloak in her lap, which means it is unlikely to slip to the floor¹⁴.

In 1530 a *Lucretia* from the Cranach workshop, like the one in Bilbao, shows the cloak as it falls off her shoulders at the moment of suicide. In this painting, now in the Sinebrychoffin Taidemuseo, Helsinki¹⁵, Lucretia is portrayed already naked; in the Bilbao version, produced four years later, Cranach prefers to play with the spectator's imagination. The subsequent Hannover and Warsaw versions feature very static,

13 In a letter in 2009 to the then owners, Koeplin noted the likeness to the Hannover *Lucretia*, although he considered the Bilbao painting of higher quality.

14 See *Lucretia*, PL_WPM_Wi11749, in Cranach Digital Archive, <http://www.lucascranach.org/digitalarchive.php> (05/12/2013).

15 See *Lucretia*, FIN_FNG_S-1994-224, in Cranach Digital Archive, <http://www.lucascranach.org/digitalarchive.php> (05/12/2013).



4. Lucas Cranach the Elder (c. 1472-1553)
Lucretia, 1535
 Oil on panel, 51.7 x 34.8 cm
 Niedersächsisches Landesmuseum Hannover, Germany
 Inv. no. PAM775



5. Lucas Cranach the Elder (c. 1472-1553)
Lucretia, after 1537
 Oil on panel, 51 x 35 cm
 Kunstsammlungen der Veste Coburg, Germany
 Inv. no. M160

immobile figures. The Helsinki and Bilbao Lucretias lean in a movement that revolves on the body's axis, giving the feel of someone still shielding herself from death. This kind of oscillation reappears in the Coburg version (Veste Coburg), painted after 1537 [fig. 5], in which the artist does without the cloak that slips off the subject's shoulders.

Apart from the position of the body, the interesting thing about the Bilbao *Lucretia* is the facial expression. One gets the impression that Cranach did not quite achieve what he set out to do, which was to convey an expression of suffering through the exaggeratedly arched eyebrows, even if the attempt is in line with the general snapshot concept. In general, only some of the portrayals of Lucretia from the Cranach workshop have a facial expression like this; these include the comparable ones from Helsinki and Warsaw mentioned above. In many others, Lucretia's beautiful face is not contorted by pain¹⁶. At times, only some slightly pursed lips betray her inner struggle.

Like the clothing, the jewellery the painted Lucretias wear about the neck (necklaces, chains and chokers mounted with precious stones) are also of the age. In some compositions, Lucretia is covered in jewels, as was apparently the custom at the court of Saxony¹⁷. The chain in the Bilbao work clings to the silhouette to emphasize her femininity. Using the drawing of this ornament to highlight the subject's feminine figure is a stylistic device that disappears until the 1540s, returning in images such as the Schleswig *Lucretia*¹⁸.

16 See *Lucretia*, DE_SPSG_GKI30187, in Cranach Digital Archive, <http://www.lucascranach.org/digitalarchive.php> (05/12/2013).

17 Friedländer/Rosenberg 1979, p. 31.

18 See *Lucretia*, DE_SHLM_1998-12, en Cranach Digital Archive, <http://www.lucascranach.org/digitalarchive.php> (05/12/2013).



6. Lucas Cranach the Elder (c. 1472-1553)
Lucretia, c. 1525
 Oil on panel, 79 x 64 cm
 Kunstmuseum Basel
 Inv. no. 1628
 Detail



7. Lucas Cranach the Elder (c. 1472-1553)
Lucretia, 1532
 Oil on panel, 37.5 x 24.5 cm
 Gemäldegalerie der Akademie der bildenden Künste Wien
 Inv. no. 557
 Detail

Surprisingly simple, in comparison with the jewels, is the hairnet that holds her hair up. In paintings where Lucretia's hair is styled, it is either pulled back and held with black ribbon [fig. 6] or gathered in a valuable pearl-studded silk cap [fig. 7]. The Bilbao version, in which she wears a simple black hairnet, is only found again in the Hannover version, where the accessory is even less ostentatious. This particular hair arrangement was chosen because the figure almost reaches the edge of the support. A silk cap with pearls would have been cut off at the top of the painting. Here, hairnet and cloak provide a transition between the stylised body and the latter, without which Lucretia would appear as a silhouette set sharply against the dark background.

At first sight, another purely decorative feature is the veil, which makes frequent appearances [figs. 3-6]. It underscores the message that Lucretia is a married woman¹⁹. If the cap is broadly associated with honour, the very discreet veil, whose transparency also makes it a symbol of modesty, seems rather irrelevant. Even so, it enables her to express her feelings of shame for what has happened. The veil in the Bilbao portrayal falls from the crown of Lucretia's head, covering her forehead as far as the eyes. It droops over her right shoulder and above the arm, reaching the foreground where, at the level of the navel, she grips it with the fingers of her left hand. The veil finally disappears in a crease beneath the cloak. At the level of the subject's elbow, on the far right of the painting, the delicate cloth disappears again under the cloak. Imagining the veil disappear under Lucretia's cloak all down her back to reappear at the level of the left elbow gives cause for some fantasies. This unusual arrangement may be seen as a sort of counterbalance to the veil concentrated in the left-hand part of the image, to achieve a certain equilibrium in the composition, where it is not important if the accessory is arranged logically or not.

The Cranachs' Wittenberg workshop spent more than thirty years on this theme, producing a long series of paintings with multiple variations, standing or seated, clothed and nude half- and full-length figures, with their hair up or loose, with or without a landscape in the background. Part of the efficiency with which work was done in the family shop, organized to the smallest detail, lay in the conservation of sketches, which would be saved for use in future commissions²⁰. This procedure was certainly applied to the series of

¹⁹ Koepplin/Falk 1974-1976, p. 662.

²⁰ Aschaffenburg 2007, p. 320.

Lucretias. However, the Bilbao painting was never repeated in similar versions as if it were a product from a series; it is rather a unique work that the Cranach workshop, at least as far as we know, did not duplicate or repeat in other works.

Provenance

Christian Zervos published the painting, now in the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum collection, for the first time in 1950. Dating the work to 1537, he gave no information other than that it had once been in a private collection in Madrid²¹. Dieter Koeplin included the same illustration in the 1976 catalogue²² to mark the exhibition organised in Basel two years before, where he gave the date as 1531²³. After the catalogue was published, the owners contacted Koeplin in 1982. At the time, the painting was in a private Spanish collection. In 2009 the expert gave his considered opinion on the work²⁴.

Documents kept by the owners²⁵ reveal the painting had had quite a chequered history: the work belonged for several generations to the family of the Marquis of Rafal and is mentioned in a testament from 1753 [fig. 8]. It probably came to Orihuela in Murcia, Spain, from Vienna when, on the occasion of the Peace of Vienna (30 April 1725), the Marquis, who had supported the Archduke of Austria in the 18th-century War of Spanish Succession, was given an amnesty and was allowed to return from exile. The Countess Vía Manuel (1850-1929), who was also Marchioness of Rafal, sent the painting from her seat in Orihuela to her residence in Madrid. She left the work to her daughter, the Duchess of Sueca.

During the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) the work was taken in by the Artistic Heritage Recovery Board and sent to the Prado Museum. It was included in the expeditions the museum organized during the war to get the artworks away from the capital. They ended up near the French border, first in Figueres Castle and then in Perelada Castle (on the back of the painting, there used to be a label with information about the move). It may have been in the Prado where Christian Zervos, a friend of Picasso and director of the Museum at the time, saw the work and took a photograph he later included in his book. After the war, the panel was returned to its owner, the Count of La Granja [figs. 9 and 10], the Duchess of Sueca's son.

In 2009 the Count of La Granja's heirs tried to auction the work at Christie's in London, but they were refused authorisation to take the painting out of the country. *Lucretia* was acquired by the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum in December 2012, where it is now on display to the public.

Technique

The *Lucretia* in the Bilbao fine Arts Museum is painted on a beech wood support consisting of three horizontally aligned and butt-joined planks²⁶. During the 1520s and 1530s beech wood was used frequently in the Cranach workshop, and this was quite exceptional in 16th-century European panel painting. Panels of this type appeared at the same time as standard formats for paintings were introduced²⁷. Between 1521 and 1535 roughly three-quarters of all the panels painted in the Cranach family shop can be grouped into

21 Zervos 1950, 77, fig. p. 63.

22 Koeplin/Falk 1974-1976, pp. 664, 666, fig. 323.

23 Both dates were suggested without the authors being aware of the date that appears in the painting.

24 Our sincere thanks to Dieter Koeplin for providing us with the documents.

25 We would like to express our gratitude to the former owner for facilitating the information and documents.

26 Our grateful thanks to Javier Novo González, Head of the Collections Department at the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum, and to José Luis Merino Gorospe, Head of the Conservation & Restoration Department, for making the analysis available.

27 Heydenreich 2007a, pp. 48-49.

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8. Marquis of Rafal's will, 1753
Archive, Bilbao Fine Arts Museum

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9. Application for the return of works belonging to the Duke of Sueca, September 1939
IPCE-Institute for the Cultural Heritage of Spain.
Ministry of Education, Culture & Sport

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La condesa de La Granja

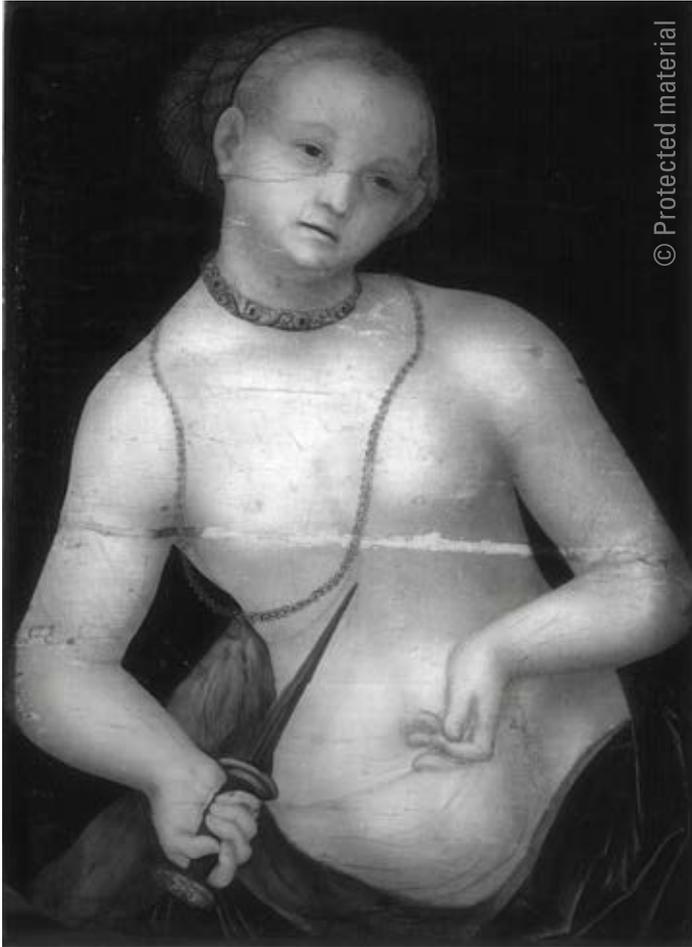
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La esbelta y juvenil figura de la bella Condesa de La Granja armoniza perfectamente con el decorado de su preciosa casa. Al fondo, sobre la chimenea, en hermoso cuadro de Lucas Cranach, y encuadrando una valiosa colección de relojes, dos finísimos bronce. Unos bellos jarrones de porcelana del Retiro destacan sobre la cómoda francesa y de marquetería y en primer término, la gran lámpara blanca ilumina suavemente este conjunto de una gran elegancia.—(Foto Zaidin.)

M. M.

10. *Luna y sol* journal, year 2, no. 12, April 1945, page 22

The Countess of La Granja at home, with the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum *Lucretia* in the background
National Library of Spain



11. Lucas Cranach the Elder (c. 1472-1553)
Lucretia, 1534
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum
Infrared reflectography

six formats. Judging by its size (50.4 x 36.4 x 1.3 centimetres), the Bilbao *Lucretia* belongs to the standard “C” format²⁸. Cranach must have introduced these standardised formats to optimise work processes in his workshop, which operated like a factory. This meant they could produce a whole stock of wood panels. Panel sizes for smaller paintings match quite strikingly the ones used for the covers of books in Wittenberg. As Cranach printed books in his workshop between 1522 and 1532, it is fair to assume that the measurements of his paintings derive from the standardised formats for printing (octavo, quarto and folio among others) and that he used them for painting²⁹. The standard “C” format Cranach used for the Bilbao *Lucretia* matches the size of an unfolded sheet of paper (double folio) and sheds light on the collaboration of the various crafts in his large workshop.

A 0.9-centimetre rebate runs along the edge on the back of the panel except on the bottom edge, from which we deduce that the panel was originally a centimetre or so taller. It is hard to tell whether it was cut out slightly to adapt it to a later frame or if the support was modified to counter and remedy instability caused by insects. The work’s original frame has not survived.

An underdrawing is not readily visible on the white ground [fig. 11]. Occasional fragmentary lines may be accents or outlines executed during the painting process. Only the preliminary drawing for the dagger can be clearly identified where the edge of the blade is indicated by a line incised in the flesh paint employing a needle. Although infrared reflectography did not reveal an underlying drawing, this does not mean the pain-

28 Ibid, p. 43.

29 Heydenreich 2007b, pp. 29-33.



12. Lucas Cranach the Elder (c. 1472-1553)
Lucretia, 1534
 Bilbao Fine Arts Museum
 Detail



13. Lucas Cranach the Elder (c. 1472-1553)
Lucretia, 1534
 Bilbao Fine Arts Museum
 Detail

ting was executed without a preliminary drawing to establish the composition. The underlying drawing may just have been a few lines in some dry medium like charcoal, black or red chalk that infrared reflectography doesn't pick up or only registers under certain conditions. Cranach is unlikely to have drawn his *Lucretia* from a model, as the figure does not fit any anatomically correct pattern of forms. It occupies the surface of the painting much more convincingly in that both elbows and the head adornments almost brush the edges of the panel in its standardised format.

The painting is masterfully and efficiently executed. Cranach achieved the delicately nuanced modelling of the forms of the body by applying and mixing clear flesh tones, and using brown glazes and cold grey tones for the shadows. With the subtle plane modulation and monochrome black background, the profile outlines contrast with the drawing of the details. Cranach pays little attention to the creases and folds of the dark red cloak. A thorough examination of the chain hanging from Lucretia's neck reveals it is painted schematically, with little volume, although Cranach does exercise his sophisticated technical skill here. The chain of changing reflections of light, beautifully adapted to the forms of the body, which in turn suggest depth, derives from the same constructive principle. Eyes, nose and mouth are expertly rendered with true economy of means, in line with Cranach's habitual canon of forms. Her eyelids, barely modelled and partially obscured, have been highlighted with a clear outline. The lower part of the eye is practically not modelled, the shadow line being replaced by fine, precisely executed lashes [fig. 12]. Details like the veil, the hair, the eyelashes and the precious stones ineluctably draw the attention of anyone looking at the painting.

Pink, black, red, brown, yellow and grey predominate in a painting executed with relatively few colours. Green is reserved for two precious stones in the necklace. Cranach draws the jewel on a reddish brown background with brown outlines and touches of yellow light, without the colours mixing. A similar reddish ochre tone applied to the jewellery is also used in the handle of the dagger and the hair; in other words, it is used to represent different materials. With economy and technical skill, the artist creates a harmonious whole from the individual features of the work. His treatment of the details reveals an experienced hand. For example the red stones of the necklace are painted in prism shapes on a black background with red opaque paint and subsequently glazed with a red lake [fig. 13].

Cranach put his seal on the painting and dated it in red in the lower left corner. Beneath the year, "1534", the winged serpent with its ring and crown faces to the right, and is difficult to spot under the thick layer of varnish [fig. 14]. Although the serpent also appears as the workshop hallmark on paintings where Cranach the Elder was not involved, the remarkable quality of the painting leaves no doubt that Cranach himself worked on this painting.



14. Lucas Cranach the Elder (c. 1472-1553)
Lucretia, 1534
 Bilbao Fine Arts Museum
 Detail with date and artist's insignia



15. Lucas Cranach the Elder (c. 1472-1553)
Lucretia, 1534
 Bilbao Fine Arts Museum
 Detail

History of the restoration

When Dieter Koeplin analysed the painting in 2009, he observed some small repainted areas probably dating from the 17th and 18th centuries. These retouches are in the shadows of the chain and the dagger, others can be found in the veil and her chest, and of the drops of blood³⁰. The drops of blood Koeplin mentions are indeed later additions, although not an alteration as such. Underneath them there is a grey-brown varnish which, when examined under the microscope transpires to be a red lake that has decoloured with time, and which was overpainted in red [fig. 15]. The shadow of the chain is to a great extent original and does not appear to cover the *craquelure*, unlike the red of the blood. However it is certainly overpainted as the application of glazes differs considerably from the coarse pigment particles employed in the shadow of the neck-chain and Lucretia's right breast. Some white lines in the veil and some strands of her hair are also later additions. One also gets the impression that the edge of the painting has been considerably repainted, something that is particularly clear at the level of the figure's right elbow. These small modifications, barely perceptible to the naked eye, are all of a later date and were not made in either of the two documented restorations of 1983 and 1996-1997.

In his report Koeplin mentions a "reinforcement of the panel" on the back which was put in place to correct warping of the support and separation of the joint. The addition, applied by Javier Carrión in 1983, was later removed. Probably for the same reason the separated joint was reglued and retouched [fig. 16]. The glue for the panel reinforcement and insect holes was probably thickened with lead white. In the wood there are remnants of a white material not from the panel ground application.

In 1996-1997, the daughter of the then owner of the painting, and a pupil of Javier Carrión's, carried out a second restoration treatment, which gave definitive retouches to the figure. She probably also took the opportunity to apply a new Paraloid B72 varnish.

³⁰ Handwritten notes on the analysis of the work by Dieter Koeplin (05/2009) in Archiv D. Koeplin.



16. Photograph of Bilbao Fine Arts Museum *Lucretia* showing the state of the work before 1983
Archive, Bilbao Fine Arts Museum



17. Back of the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum *Lucretia* before treatment in 2012
Archive, Bilbao Fine Arts Museum

In 2012 Albert Glatigny, from the Institut Royal du Patrimoine Artistique in Brussels, did further conservation work on the wood support, which involved filling numerous holes on the back of the panel [fig. 17] with micropearls and replacing the wooden strips along the joins with balsa wood. In the lower right-hand corner balsa wood was also used to replace a missing fragment.

Conclusion

In the 16th century, the theme of Lucretia was very popular as a portrayal of fidelity in marriage and of moral fortitude. At the same time, it also gave artists the chance to portray a naked woman. The high number of works produced at the Cranach family workshop over more than three decades bears witness to the huge demand for paintings on this subject. However, there is no doubt that the Bilbao *Lucretia* is not a mass-produced article. Many features are indicative of Cranach and suggest a desire to demonstrate his own mastery at a time when the workshop was meeting demands with mass-produced paintings (for which his two adolescent sons were also employed).

This masterpiece by Lucas Cranach the Elder, sadly ignored by the experts for so long, now enhances and enriches the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum collection of 16th-century painting, and does furthermore, through one of the finest German painters of the age.

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