

Self-portrait with Studio Interior
by Antonio Gisbert in the collection
of the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum



Luis Alberto Pérez Velarde

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

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“The first impulse of any art lover [...] is to assemble a collection of paintings at home. Before doing so, I would like him to collect prints and drawings as they infinitely assist in understanding the merit of paintings.”¹

In 1916 a self-portrait of the artist in his studio by the painter Antonio Gisbert (Alcoy, Alicante, 1834-Paris, 1901) entered the collection of the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum, having previously been in the collection of Baron Quinto [fig. 1].² The painting can be dated around 1865, coinciding with the artist’s initial period in Paris, where he lived on various occasions during the course of his lifetime and where he executed some of his most important works.

Self-portraits, which became a widespread genre in painting in the 19th century, have traditionally been used to express the state of mind of their creators and to convey the essence of their artistic personality through the elements included in the composition. Most painters used their self-portraits as an authentic manifesto of their artistic abilities, making reference in them to their status as painter or their social standing. The definition of the word “self-portrait” in the Dictionary of the Real Academia Española makes the nature of this artistic genre quite clear: “portrait of a person executed by that person.”³

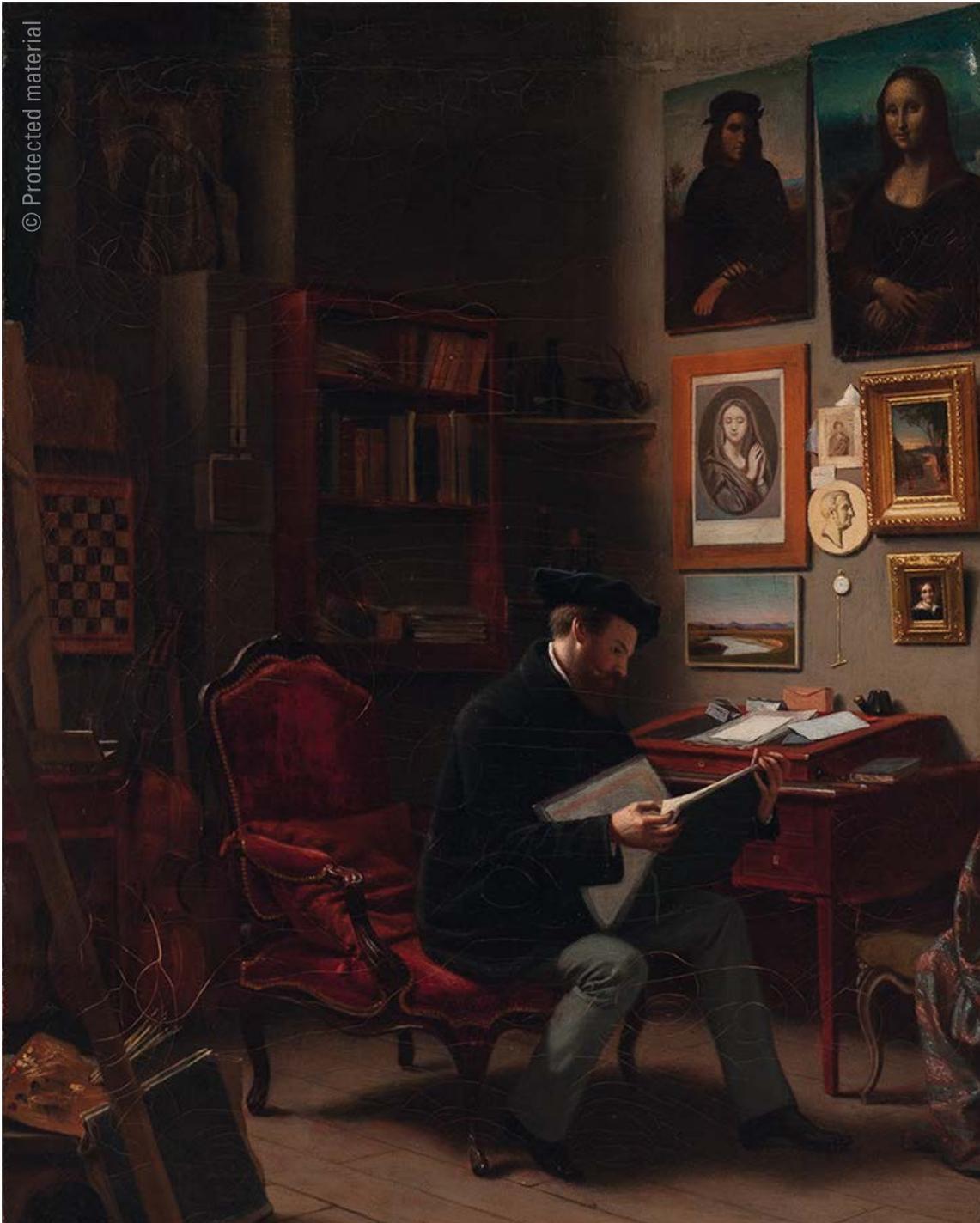
The figure in the present painting can be identified as Antonio Gisbert from his appearance in the earliest photographs of him [fig. 2], in which his face is framed by soft black hair with a high forehead due to his prematurely receding hairline. He has a large, bushy beard, a thin, aquiline nose and large, dark eyes with a lively look that give him all the charm of a Romantic era painter.

Antonio Gisbert portrayed himself on various occasions throughout his life and he appears in a considerable number of his best known works. He is to be seen, for example, in *Rebecca and Eliezer* [fig. 3], a work he executed for the official exams of the Real Academia de San Fernando to obtain a grant to study in Rome. It depicts the biblical episode of the encounter between Rebecca and Eliezer at the well, which took place

1 Ceán Bermúdez 1805, pp. 19-20.

2 That year, the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum acquired Bernardo Bellotto’s *Architectural Caprice with a Palace* (inv. no. 69/354), at that date attributed to Hubert Robert, from Baron Quinto (of whom nothing is known other than that his name was José Muñoz), and the present *Self-Portrait with Studio Interior* by Antonio Gisbert (inv. no. 69/108). Novo 2010, pp.207 and 216, note 69.

3 Francisco Calvo Serraller. “Las apariencias también engañan” in *El País*, “Babelia” supplement, 30 August 2008, p. 18.



1. Antonio Gisbert (Alcoy, Alicante, 1834-Paris, 1901)
Self-portrait with Studio Interior, c. 1865
Oil on canvas, 48 x 37.5 cm
Bilbao Fine Arts Museum
Inv. no. 69/108



2. Antonio Gisbert
Photographer: Jean Laurent
City Council of Madrid. Museo de Historia
Inv. no. 23465-102

outside the city of Nachor in Mesopotamia. Gisbert included himself as Eliezer, Abraham's oldest servant, whose features and bushy beard recall the young artist's appearance.

Gisbert also appears as one of the figures in *The Communards Padilla, Bravo and Maldonado on the Scaffold* [fig. 5], a work that brought him the reputation of an artist sympathetic to the progressive ideas that circulated in artistic and political circles of his day. Gisbert depicted himself as one of the communards at the dramatic moment of climbing the steps of the improvised scaffold erected in the main square in Villalar, while an elderly friar holding a crucifix tries to console him. This painting made Gisbert the preferred painter of the Liberal party, which regularly offered him commissions during its periods of government.

The artist also appears in *Doña María de Molina presenting her Son, the Infante Don Fernando, to the Cortes de Castilla assembled in Valladolid in 1295*. The painting was commissioned from Gisbert in late 1860 by the Home Affairs Committee of the Congress and forms a pair with *The Swearing of Loyalty of the Cadiz Cortes in 1810* by José Casado del Alisal. Gisbert appears among the crowd as one of the figures swearing loyalty to the boy-king, raising his right hand to his breast as a fervent defender of Castile and with the above-mentioned and easily recognisable physical features. The choice of subject probably reflects the desire to depict a theme – that of the heroic queen fighting to prove her own legitimacy as successor and that of her children – which had obvious relevance at the time the painting was executed during the reign of Isabel II. The painter Martín Rico also appears in the composition, as he noted in his *Recollections*: "Gisbert painted his painting of Doña María de Molina, which is in the Congress, and I was the model for one of the warriors, who looked like a king of spades."⁴

Finally, Gisbert depicted himself with remarkable lifelikeness in his best known work, *The Execution of Torrijos and his Companions on the Beach at Malaga*, as one of the Capuchin monks placing a blindfold on the former War Minister, Francisco Fernández Golfín, who clasps Torrijos's hand in his own right hand

4 Rico 1907, pp. 40-41.



3. Antonio Gisbert (Alcoy, Alicante, 1834-Paris, 1901)
Rebecca and Eliezer, 1853
Oil on canvas, 122 x 167 cm
Palace of Aranjuez, Madrid. Patrimonio Nacional

before they are shot. The painting was commissioned by Práxedes Mateo Sagasta's Liberal government and can be considered a major work which immortalised the example of General José María Torrijos's defence of liberties, cut short by Ferdinand VII of Spain. Gisbert was fifty-four when he painted it and the passing of time is evident on his face, as Adrián Espí observed: "Let us look at his face, removing his monk's hood for a moment; what we see is an almost bald head; here we have his distinctive nose, his eyes sunk in their sockets, his chin covered with a grey beard."⁵

The history of the painting

Having entered the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum, the painting was included in the institution's early catalogues, including the one published in 1932. It was also published in 1969 by Crisanto de Lasterra, who described it in the following terms: "The artist, seen in the privacy of his studio. He wears the broad beret used by painters of the time and is seated in a red velvet chair, leafing through a portfolio of drawings on his knee. Next to him is a small writing desk and on the wall copies of Leonardo, Raphael and other masters. In the background in the shadows is a bookcase."⁶

5 Espí 1966, p. 6.

6 Lasterra 1969, p. 49, no. 108.

The painting has recently attracted the attention of numerous specialists. In the opinion of Wifredo Rincón, it is a “compendium of the approach and education of the 19th-century artist, trained in painting by copying canvases by the Old Masters during his time as a grant student in Rome and Paris, enlightening himself with the books in his library, some of them of considerable importance, and perusing the hundreds of drawings, studies, notes or simple sketches that he keeps in his portfolios, either to find a subject or develop an idea.”⁷

In the opinion of José Luis Díez, this painting is “one of the most interesting and delightful of its genre”, while Gisbert depicts himself “not exercising his profession of painter, whose tools make only a timid appearance at the left edge of the canvas, but in the act of contemplating a portfolio of prints and drawings.”⁸

For Adrián Espí: “Gisbert is elegantly dressed, wearing a suit of a style that reflects the good Romantic that he really was, a Romantic who didn’t want the times to move on, painting in Monet and Pissarro’s Paris with techniques, methods and visions that were totally different, belonging to another world and another Rococo era filled with luminaries.”⁹

Notable for Carlos Reyero are “three important issues: firstly his informal but at the same time dapper and elegant appearance, indicating a man firmly located in his own time; secondly, the fact that he wishes to present himself as a cultured man by showing himself surrounded by books in a comfortable room; and thirdly, the fact that he depicts himself with some unmistakable visual references that allude to Leonardo, Raphael and Ingres, the bedrock of the purist trend.”¹⁰

María Dolores Antigüedad del Castillo has analysed the painting “in relation to the meaning, rather than the form, of Edouard Manet’s portrait of Emile Zola (1867-1868). The writer is shown sitting in an armchair while on the background wall is a print by the Japanese artist Utamaro, a clearly oriental screen and a reproduction of Velázquez’s *The Topers*, in addition to his own *Olympia*. Like Gisbert, Manet also wished to acknowledge his debt to the past.”¹¹

Carlos G. Navarro has emphasised “the artist’s independent character in relation to his Spanish contemporaries in Paris, given that here in fact he only seems to acknowledge as his masters painters who were authentic legends by the 1860s – particularly for a history painter such as Gisbert who adhered to the tradition of academic purism – and whose lesson was none other than the admiration and recognition that the memory of their work aroused.”¹² Navarro has also recently referred to the painting as “an authentic declaration of his aesthetic creed, unique in the context of Spain.”¹³

The life of Antonio Gisbert

When Antonio Gisbert was born in Alcoy at 12 noon on 19 December 1834, the oppressive reign of Ferdinand VII had recently come to an end. At the time of his birth his family enjoyed a comfortable financial and social position. The young Gisbert embarked on his early education at the local school run by the priest Antonio

7 Rincón 1991, p. 36.

8 Madrid 1997a, p. 54.

9 Espí 1999, p. 114.

10 Reyero 2002, p. 345.

11 Antigüedad del Castillo-Olivares 2004, p. 76.

12 G. Navarro 2008, p. 240.

13 G. Navarro 2015, p. 86.



4. Antonio Gisbert (Alcoy, Alicante, 1834-Paris, 1901)
Venus Anadyomene, 1858
Oil on canvas, 225 x 119 cm
Real Academia Bellas Artes de San Fernando, Madrid

González Valor,¹⁴ where he showed little interest in books, as most of his biographers have noted, but a great deal in art, painting the sets for modest theatrical performances and helping his father to make the stage wings, thus earning himself the nickname of "*pintoret*."

From the outset, Gisbert revealed a preference for portraiture demonstrating a remarkable capacity to achieve complete lifelikeness in his depiction of the model due to his exceptional talent for drawing. Gisbert's love of his family is evident in his series of portraits of those closest to him, which transcend from the outset the strictly domestic level to become pictorial works of great quality, as well as good examples of his earliest efforts as a painter in Alcoy. These portraits of family members are characterised by an affectionate closeness in which emotional expressivity and the pre-eminence of the subject, stripped of any incidental detail, acquires the utmost importance.

Gisbert moved to Madrid around 1848 with the aim of settling there permanently, entering the studio of a theatrical set painter and friend of his family as an apprentice. He subsequently enrolled at the Lower School of Drawing, located on calle Santa Catalina and part of the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando. Finally, he joined the senior classes at the Academia, where he received the best training available in Spain,

¹⁴ A calligraphy exercise in the Municipal Archive in Alcoy has the following inscription, which confirms this relationship: "By Antonio Gisbert Pupil of D. Antonio González Valor year 1848". In addition, a private collection in Alcoy has a portrait of the priest painted by the young Gisbert.

with rigorous teachers who included some of the leading painters of the day, as a result of which Gisbert achieved notable levels in both portraiture and history painting.

Not only did Gisbert become an outstanding painter but also an historian of the enthusiastic, liberal type common among the literati of his day and a regular participant in the discussion groups which gathered in the city's cafés. Gisbert had mastered both drawing and the use of colour but more than that, he was a great Romantic.¹⁵

José de Madrazo, a key figure for an understanding of Spanish art of this period and a painter who, as a pupil of David, was able to pass on directly to his students, from Paris to Madrid, the precepts of the latter's Neo-classicism,¹⁶ recognised the signs of a great artist in Gisbert and consistently encouraged him. Madrazo's hopes were soon confirmed when Gisbert triumphed in the hotly contested exams for study grants in Rome with his painting *The Raising of Lazarus*.¹⁷

Having obtained funding to study Fine Arts in Rome, in late 1855 Gisbert moved to Italy to continue his training as a State grant student together with the painter José Casado del Alisal and the sculptor Felipe Moratilla. Gisbert remained there as a grant student from 1855 to 1858, sending back the required works to the Real Academia in Madrid, among them his *Venus Anadyomene* [fig. 4]. On his arrival in Rome he must have visited all the monuments and galleries that were obligatory viewing for every artist who came to the city, among which the Basilica of Saint Peter and the Sistine Chapel were particularly important.

The study of antiquity and the works of the Renaissance were essential reference points, for which reason the trip to Rome became a pilgrimage to see the most beautiful examples of the art of the past at first hand. For a painter born into a modest family such as Gisbert, the Roman study period must have represented a fundamental stimulus for orienting his artistic studies and acquiring direct knowledge of the great pictorial tradition of the Renaissance through Michelangelo and Raphael.

Gisbert's participation in the National Fine Arts Exhibitions in Spain was characterised by his defence of Liberal ideals through depictions of exemplary historical episodes. While still in Italy he participated in the 1858 Exhibition with a history painting, *The Last Moments of Prince Don Carlos*. All of Gisbert's oeuvre reveals a refined aesthetic derived from the tradition of academic purism, on the basis of which he constructed his own artistic personality, which was particularly suitable for large-format painting. His ordered, serene style reached its maturity with *The Communards Padilla, Bravo and Maldonado on the Scaffold* [fig. 5], which he presented at the 1860 Exhibition, gaining him a First Class medal. This canvas would bring Gisbert permanent recognition as an artist committed to the Liberal cause and also earned him an extension of his study grant so that he could move to Paris.

In his endeavour to construct his own artistic personality Gisbert focused on the masterpieces of the Renaissance painters and on the work of the Nazarenes. His paintings also reveal the influence of the French Romantics and of Italian genre paintings of everyday life and popular customs. These different trends, including the notable influence of Federico de Madrazo, came together to construct a notable and interesting oeuvre.

¹⁵ Lago 1916, p. 23.

¹⁶ David accepted into his studio young art students from throughout Europe who possessed a high level of painting. From Spain he accepted José de Madrazo, a fact that would have a profound influence on the following generation of painters there.

¹⁷ *La Época*, 29 November 1901, p. 1.



5. Antonio Gisbert (Alcoy, Alicante, 1834-Paris, 1901)
The Communards Padilla, Bravo and Maldonado on the Scaffold, 1860
 Oil on canvas, 255 x 365 cm
 Archive of the Congreso de los Diputados, Madrid
 Inv. no. 02105

In late February 1861, Gisbert set out for Paris with a State study grant. By early March he had settled in the capital with the aim of spending two further years abroad and of painting another work, this time on the subject of María de Molina presenting her son, the boy-king Ferdinand IV, known as “the Summoned”, to the Cortes in Valladolid. Working in the house of León Bonnat, who had returned by that date from Rome, Gisbert began his very large canvas on María de Molina,¹⁸ which would be criticised by Raimundo de Madrazo, who saw in it “the decline of history painting.”¹⁹

At this period Gisbert was living at number 7, rue Chaptal where he also had his studio, as was common practice with artists in this quarter, located close to Montmartre and Batignolles. All the Spanish artists living in Paris enjoyed a carefree, bohemian existence, meeting for debates and discussion at night in the cafés on the covered gallery known as the Passage Jouffroy, one of the liveliest locations off the Boulevard Montmartre. “Catalans and Valencians, people from Madrid and Bilbao, get together every night chez Garen, a café that used to be on the Boulevard Montmartre next to the Passage Jouffroy. Both those living on the right bank and those living on the left, the artists attending the studios of Couture, Gérôme, Meissonier and Gleyre, and the grant students at the School, at that date the Imperial Fine Arts, would take their beer or their *demi-tasse* in the inner room of that establishment, which could be considered something like the Con-

¹⁸ Rico 2012, p. 23.

¹⁹ Raimundo de Madrazo conveyed his opinion of the history painting of the new generation of artists when he commented on Gisbert’s painting for the Hall of the Congress in Madrid: “We consider this painting fairly good, but it is mediocre, and represents the decline of history painting treated in the manner of Paul Delaroche. Casado has painted the pendant”. Bilbao 2006, p. 76.

sulate for the Spanish art world in Paris. The easel painters were the first to arrive, then the draughtsmen, followed by the set painters. They engaged in heated discussions on artistic matters, recounted juicy studio stories, gossiped a bit about absent friends and talked about colleagues back in Barcelona, Valencia and Madrid, while passing from hand to hand the obligatory snuff box, from which everyone took a pinch, paying tribute to a vice that had not yet gone out of fashion in the world of artists or among the rest of humanity. With greater or lesser regularity, all the long-haired members of this colony frequented that meeting place, an assembly of artistic debate, a gazette of Trans-Pyrenean news and a stock exchange of anecdotes and bons mots.²⁰

In the changing Paris of the early 1860s, where the Salon des Refusés opened on 15 May 1863, two weeks after the opening of the Official Salon, the sizeable group of Spanish artists in the city met regularly for their lively after-dinner debates at the Café de Mulhouse: "The young Spanish artists dedicated to painting in Paris are working with fruitful results, as we read in a letter from that capital. Gisbert and Casado are fairly well advanced with the paintings they are executing for the government, and everyone is waiting for them to produce two new works worthy of those which have earned them such a fully justified reputation."²¹

Gisbert spent lengthy periods in Paris, a city he knew well, but in the spring of 1868 he decided to return to Madrid. During this new phase he assumed the responsibility of giving visual form to the ideological aspirations of the progressive Liberals who conspired against Isabel II and supported Amadeo of Savoy. Following the 1868 Revolution he obtained various public posts which fully consolidated his status as an official painter: director of the Museo Real and of the Museo de Tapices in El Escorial. At the same time, he devised a new Liberal imagery in his portraits of the Duke and Duchess of la Torre, the Duke and Duchess of Prim and Amadeo I, while he continued to produce paintings on selected episodes from Spanish history. In addition to offering a superb lesson in painting, his portraits also reveal the use of an idiom with French influences. The artist's early training, including the time he spent in Madrid, Rome and above all Paris, where he had had the opportunity to see and study works by other portraitists exhibited in the museums that he visited in order to make copies, was fundamental for defining the essential outlines of his style.

Gisbert's life was closely connected to Paris, a city that he came to know during his initial time there in the 1860s and where he subsequently chose to live in voluntary exile and spend the final years of his life. In Paris he attended the Salons, artistic events which throughout the 19th century tended to favour the display of academic paintings that closely reflected what was considered good artistic taste, as dictated by the Académie des Beaux-Arts, founded on the study of the nude, stylistic correctness, a mastery of drawing over colour and harmony of composition.

A considerable number of Spanish painters settled in Paris due to the presence of the most prestigious art dealers of the day, who sold their works in Europe and the United States. Gisbert made full use of his abilities, executing numerous works inspired by literary themes, and soon adapted himself to the Parisian context in order to attract clients from the upper ranks of the bourgeoisie with a type of genre painting derived from Meissonier. In addition, he also produced two important history paintings: *Christopher Columbus embarking from the Port of Palos* (present whereabouts unknown) and, in 1888, *The Execution of Torrijos and his Companions on the Beach at Malaga*, a commission that is only comprehensible in the context of his Liberal past.

20 Raimon Casellas. "Manuel Ferrán y su tiempo", *La Vanguardia*, 8 August 1896, p. 5.

21 *La Época*, 8 January 1862, p. 4.

The artist now lived in Batignolles, a village that although annexed to the capital by a decree of Napoleon III in 1860 had retained some of its provincial character. It was inhabited by small-holders and members of the middle-class who had acquired second homes there due to the fame of its clean air. Undoubtedly attracted by this feature in the hope that it would help his pulmonary problems, Gisbert lived in the Villa des Arts, a building of artists' studios located at number 15, rue Hégésippe-Moureau.²² His preferred genre continued to be the one known in Spain as "dress coat" painting: scenes of gallantry set in the 18th century. Works of this type represent the principal trend in Spanish painting in Paris during this period.

Gisbert died aged sixty-six on 25 November 1901, the "victim of a rapid and grievous illness",²³ having received the sacraments at his home in Paris. He was buried in the cemetery in Batignolles with his younger siblings Camilo and María in attendance. Gisbert's tomb was installed on the Perpendicular Avenue in the cemetery, division 23, line 2, number 13. He lies alongside the woman with whom he shared the last years of his life, Anne Fairant, who was buried on 23 September 1911.

The French press published obituary notices which included information on Gisbert's positions and honours: former director of the Museo de Madrid, commander of the Order of Isabel la Católica and of Carlos III; and a knight of the Légion d'Honneur. His death was much lamented among the Spanish colony in Paris.

Self-portrait with Studio Interior

Painted in his studio on rue Chaptal in Paris when he was thirty-one and at the height of his career as a history painter and portraitist, this canvas constitutes a presentation of Gisbert's aesthetic ideas. With his depiction of an artist's studio in the 19th century, he invites the viewer to enter into the heart of his creative realm, a comfortable room that he occupied in Montmartre in the 1860s. In its edition of 7 March 1864, the Parisian *Journal des Beaux Arts* offered information on the building: "L'atelier de M. Willems et situé dans une des belles maisons de la rue Chaptal, précisément en face de ce lui qu'occupe M. Antonio Gisbert."²⁴

Gisbert's painting can be related to the works that the French grant students of the Romantic generation exchanged with each other during their time in the Villa Medici in Rome, set in the interiors of their studios and conveying the domestic life of these artists with a certain literary flavour.²⁵ These studios acted as meeting places where artists went to chat or engage in artistic discussions. The journalist and writer Julio Nombela referred to the life led by artists in the French capital: "Some painters, such as Gisbert, Casado del Alisal and Ruipérez, had their respective studios and were esteemed by those who still formed part of the Spanish artistic bohemia, but everyone fraternised and I spent some very happy times in the company of those artists, who for the most part later achieved merited fame and of whom I was always a faithful admirer and good friend."²⁶

Gisbert's painting is a manifesto of the career of a 19th-century painter who, following his training as a grant student in Rome and Paris, took the study of the Old Masters such as Raphael and Leonardo and the modern masters such as Ingres as his reference point. Gisbert's training during his time as a copyist in Madrid in the

22 Through which passed painters such as Léon Bonnat, Benjamin Constant, Eugène Carrière, Paul Cézanne, Auguste Renoir, Paul Signac, Louis Marcoussis, Francis Picabia and Marcel Jean, among others.

23 *Arquitectura y Construcción*, Barcelona, year V, no. 113, December 1901, p. 387. A pulmonary infection was the cause of Gisbert's death.

24 Gueullette 1864, p. 226.

25 G. Navarro 2008, p. 240.

26 Nombela 1976, pp. 626-627.



6. Antonio Gisbert (Alcoy, Alicante, 1834-Paris, 1901)
A Gentleman, c. 1850-1860
Chalk and charcoal on paper, 60 x 43 cm
Private collection, Alcoy, Alicante

Museo de la Trinidad and the Museo del Prado, as well as in Rome, and his frequent visits to the Louvre had provided him with a grounding that few artists of his time possessed.

Here he depicts an interior (probably his own studio) in which we see an easel and a palette holding numerous brushes in the lower left corner. Within this studio setting he presents himself as a cultivated, elegantly dressed man engaged in the admiring study of prints and drawings. Artists used prints in their studios as models for their compositions and they were a key element in the training of apprentices. Gisbert is shown seated with his legs apart and in profile while he leafs through a portfolio with the idea of finding a sketch or drawing that might inspire a new work, perhaps one of his famous historical compositions. Behind him, a neatly arranged bookcase emphasises the artist's intellectual training within a domestic setting that recalls Dutch interiors due to the way the subtle gradation of light and shade falls on different areas of the room. Gisbert, who had a masterly ability to convey the poses and expressions of his figures, became celebrated as a painter of historical themes, undertaking careful research based on the literary and historical texts that we see here in his library and on his desk, presented as everyday objects for consultation with the aim of offering accurate depictions in his compositions. History painting was a key genre within Gisbert's oeuvre, which developed in parallel to his consolidation as an artist.

Gisbert was a tall, slim man of fine presence. Here he is seen neatly dressed in a dark overcoat and narrow, grey trousers wearing a black beret to protect him from the cold typical of artists' studios.²⁷ This beret is very

27 Rincón 1991, p. 36.



7. Antonio Gisbert (Alcoy, Alicante, 1834-Paris, 1901)
Portrait of Santiago Rebull, 1857
 Oil on canvas, 50 x 40 cm
 Private collection, Mexico City

similar to one that appears in one of his early drawings of *A Gentleman* [fig. 6], in which the figure wears one of typically Renaissance style.

By including a large number of different objects in the scene Gisbert offers valuable information about his tastes and interests and thus about himself. The books and sheets of paper on the writing desk harmonise with the other objects on it, such as the seal, the blotter and the cigar that the artist has just put down.²⁸ On the shelves to the right of the bookcase are some green glass bottles and a pair of deer antlers, a decorative element that also appears in the depiction of Zamacois's studio in *The untimely Visit* by that artist, also in the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum. Hanging on the wall on the left are a thermometer and a calendar while above them, in the shadow of a recess in the wall, stands a reproduction of a Greek sculpture. Seemingly made in plaster, it appears to be a figure of Nike which Gisbert probably saw in the Musée du Louvre.²⁹

²⁸ "... and Gisbert lighted his cigar and clapped his Calabrian hat on." Ramírez 1861, p. 11.

²⁹ Eduardo Zamacois in *The Artist and his Friends* (1862, Museo de Bellas Artes de Málaga) includes archaeological references such as the *Venus de Milo*, one of the most admired works of classical antiquity.

The scene is completed by a chessboard, a popular print that is difficult to identify, a wooden beam and a viola da gamba, an instrument associated with the passions and emotions, including the melancholy that tinges this scene. In general, the predominance of dark zones and the arrangement of a variety of objects in the room recall Dürer's celebrated print *Melencolia*, which had inspired self-portraits by other artists including Géricault, who adopts the same pose as Dürer's figure, his head supported by his hand.³⁰ Gisbert was a great music lover and in 1864 the work he presented at the National Exhibition was entitled *The Disembarkation of the Puritans in America*, a theme made fashionable by Bellini's celebrated opera *I puritani*, which he could well have seen in Rome or Madrid.³¹ Discreetly visible in the scene are his easel and palette with numerous brushes (also present in his *Portrait of Santiago Rebull* [fig. 7]) and a document folder, on which he included his signature, "Gisbert", and the date of the work, perhaps 1865, which is illegible.

Among the paintings to be seen in Gisbert's Parisian studio are two important copies made in the Louvre, one of Leonardo da Vinci's celebrated *Mona Lisa* and the other a melancholy portrait of an unknown man now attributed to Franciabigio but considered an original by Raphael until 1852. The fact that they are unframed reduces their visual importance in comparison to the other framed paintings on the wall. Beneath the male portrait is a print after Ingres' *Virgin adoring the Host* in a reverse direction to the original work. One of that artist's most beautiful religious paintings, it was widely disseminated through prints as a devotional image. These works undoubtedly contributed to the formation of Gisbert's style, with his archetypal ideals of beauty and the excellent, precise drawing that he employed to define his figures.

It is possible to imagine Gisbert's studio on the basis of the one that he had in Rome some years earlier, where "sketches, portraits and studies from life hung at random on the walls of the living room; to be seen in artistic disorder on a table were prints, photographs, portfolios, pipes, tobacco and books, with spines that read Mariana, Sandoval, Schiller and Alfieri. Located in the centre of the studio were two easels, one of them with an almost finished painting of Venus arising from the foam of the Sea; while the other had the start of the canvas of Philip II blessing Prince Don Carlos moments before his death."³²

Gisbert's concept of the atelier can also be related to that of other artists, for example Ingres, who as a teacher placed absolute priority on drawing, starting with the copying of prints, preferably those by Marcantonio Raimondi after paintings by Raphael, in order to learn line and shading. While Gisbert's contact with Ingres must have been a brief and early one, his teacher Federico de Madrazo, who attended Ingres' studio together with Carlos Luis de Ribera, became the Spanish painter who most faithfully assimilated and applied Ingres' formats in his female portraits.³³

Nonetheless, Ingres' models were gradually disseminated in Spanish painting. Gisbert reveals this in his *Venus Anadyomene*, with its use of the classical canons of proportion and beauty and a work "already understood as a reference of academic authority."³⁴ Gisbert also portrayed his friend Salustiano de Olózaga in three-quarter length [fig. 8], presented frontally and seated in a wooden armchair, in an image that reflects

30 It also recalls Dürer's print of *Saint Jerome in his Studio* (1514, Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid).

31 In addition, the work that Gisbert painted for the National Exhibition of 1858, *The Last Moments of Prince Don Carlos*, can be related to Verdi's celebrated opera *Don Carlo*, based on Schiller's play and first performed in 1867. Both works offer one of the most critical presentations of Philip II and particularly contributed to disseminating the sinister legend of that monarch.

32 Ramírez 1861, p. 10.

33 "Their respective fathers, José de Madrazo and Juan Antonio de Ribera, having in turn been students of David. This fact drew the Franco-Spanish artistic connection even closer together, while it made French Romanticism the backbone of our 19th-century painting, at least of the first half of the century." Calvo Serraller 2016, p. 32.

34 G. Navarro 2015, p. 86.



8. Antonio Gisbert (Alcoy, Alicante, 1834-Paris, 1901)
Don Salustiano de Olózaga Armandoz, 1872
Oil on canvas, 130 x 96 cm
Archive of the Congreso de los Diputados, Madrid
Inv. no. 02013



9. Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres
(Montauban, France, 1780-Paris, 1867)
Portrait of Louis-François Bertin, 1832
Oil on canvas, 116 x 95 cm
Musée du Louvre, Paris

and conveys the personality of this turbulent politician. For this work Gisbert looked to Ingres' portrait of *Monsieur Bertin* [fig. 9], an image notable for its extraordinary realism and its composition, with the figure seemingly set in a cylinder, the same device that Picasso would use for his portrait of Gertrude Stein.

Also on the wall in the present work is a small landscape, possibly a copy of one by Pierre-Henri Valenciennes or Achille Etna Michallon, painters who formulated a synthesis of the classical and the naturalistic within the development of French landscape painting. A pocket watch hanging from a nail indicates that time has stopped in the studio in order to show Gisbert, engaged in his studies prior to the process of creation. Higher up, above a medallion with a profile portrait in relief that probably depicts Delarochette, a key artist for history painters, is a print that can be identified as after Raphael's *Portrait of Baldassare Castiglione*, the original also in the Louvre.³⁵ Finally, there is a mysterious small portrait in a gilt frame which may evoke the memory of an absent relative.

The present painting is clearly related to Gisbert's *Portrait of Santiago Rebull* of 1857, now in a private Mexican collection. Rebull is shown with his arms crossed, standing in his austere studio in which he affirms his status as an artist through elements that refer to his profession, such as his palette, brushes, plaster fragments of a sculpture of feet, and the preliminary study for a painting. His shadow fills the rest of the composition, which is subtly modelled by a pale light that reinforces the idea of the poverty of this meagre studio. The elegantly dressed young painter with his arms crossed, looking out fixedly at the viewer, is a Romantic who reflects on and above all dreams about his future. Gisbert and Rebull met in Rome where they were both grant students in the 1850s, being among the most notable students in their respective countries. They saw each other regularly and in a desire to express his appreciation of their friendship, Gisbert painted Rebull in his studio, referring to the intimate, reserved character which generally defines depictions of this type.³⁶

In conclusion, *Self-portrait with Studio Interior* by Antonio Gisbert can be seen as a doorway that opens onto the painter's private universe, his hidden realm.

35 G. Navarro 2008, p. 240.

36 In addition to the bibliography provided in these notes, further information can be obtained from the following sources: Plasencia 1932, Pedrós 1935, Espí 1966, Leonardini 1983, Portela 1986, Madrid 1995b, Valencia 2000, Bilbao 2000, Madrid 2007, Alcoy 2010, Tillier 2014, Alonso Cabezas 2015 and Pérez Velarde 2015.

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