



Luis de Madrazo y Kuntz

Madrid, 1825 – Madrid, 1897

Don Pelayo, king of Asturias

1856

Oil on canvas

224 × 140 cm

Within the set of paintings known as the **Chronological Series of the Kings and Queens of Spain**, which is on display in this room, this particular work is the most noteworthy. It is a portrait of **Pelagius of Asturias**. He is depicted standing amidst a rocky landscape, with leafy vegetation and running water, much like the landscape that surrounds this museum. Indeed, the small waterfall we can see on the right may be a reference to the *Santa Cueva* and its beautiful cascade of water from inside the mountain. In the background, the rising sun symbolises the dawn of the Christian conquest, embodied in the form of Pelagius, the founder of the **Kingdom of Asturias** and leader of the first Christian rebellion against the Muslims, which began at **Cangas de Onís**.

Pelagius is grasping a cross in his left hand; this is a reference to the **Victory Cross**, with its trefoil design at the end of each arm. In his right hand, the king is gripping the hilt of his sword, in a gesture that lends tension to the scene. The same applies to his expression: he is staring beyond the canvas with a steely and challenging gaze, causing us to wonder what he might be looking at; while his body language suggests vigour and a predisposition towards action.

The painting was commissioned from **Luis de Madrazo** by his father, **José de Madrazo**, who set in motion the process of producing a chronological series of portraits of the kings and queens of Spain. The project aimed to create a visual record of all of the Spanish sovereigns from the Visigothic era onwards, and was intended to bolster the historical legitimacy of the Spanish monarchy at a time when it was experiencing a period of weakness, during the reign of Queen Isabella II. The artist, **Luis de Madrazo**, had previously produced an important history painting titled *Pelagius of Asturias in Covadonga*, which currently forms part of the decoration of the main altar in the basilica. In this portrait, which is without a doubt the most important and meaningful work in the Chronological Series of the Kings and Queens of Spain, the artist had the opportunity to focus on a specific individual, which enabled him to explore the details of the subject's clothing and give more psychological depth to his expression.