

# Caylus



## FRANCISCO LACOMA Y FONTANET

(Barcelona, 1784 – 1849, Passy, Paris)

*Portrait of a Boy with a Dog*

*Portrait of a Boy with a Nest*

1828

Oil on canvas, a pair

47 x 37 cm, each

Signed: "Lacoma / Paris 1828"

Both inscribed on the stretcher: "Espagnole"

PROVENANCE:

Jean Havin, Argent-sur-Sauldre, lot 19, July 2018

Francisco José Pablo Lacoma y Fontanet was born in Barcelona in 1778, the son of Francisco Lacoma who also seems to have been a painter. He initially attended the Escuela de Nobles Artes of the Chamber of Commerce of Barcelona where it is believed that he was a promising pupil of Salvador Molet (1773-1836), for which reason he specialised in flower and decorative painting from an early date. In March, April and May Lacoma obtained his first recognition at the school in the form of a third, second and first course prize in the category of flower painting from life. In February 1800 he was awarded first prize for flower and ornamental painting then immediately competed again in the category of flower painting from life, being awarded a third, second and two first prizes corresponding to the months of March, April, May and June. In 1802, and continuing with the progress made in his cursus honorum within the field of flower painting, he took part in the School's annual competition and was awarded a prize of 20 pesos for being the best student in the flower and decorative class, plus a bonus of prints to the value of 10 pesos for being awarded the special prize for the classes in flower and ornament painting, invention of flowers and flowers from life. Finally, in the triennial competition held in 1803, Lacoma obtained the first prize in the category of flower and decorative painting (ALCOLEA: 1951, pp. 149-157; ALCOLEA: 1959-1960, pp. 11-347; Junta de Comercio de Barcelona, Libros de Acuerdos, 1799, fols. 62, 102, and 123; 1800: fols. 26, 88, 130, 188 and 263; 1802: fols. 305; 1803: fol. 244; 1804: fols. 42, 69 and 119; 1805: fol. 8 and 242; 1806: fol. 43; and 1814: fol. 275).

The confusion present in much of the literature from the mid-19th century onwards between this artist and Francisco Lacoma y Sans (1784-1812), another Barcelona-born and exactly contemporary painter who trained at the same school, has given rise to numerous errors that resulted in the two Lacomas being fused into one person. The origin of this confusion may be the catalogue of the paintings in the museum of the Academia Provincial de Bellas Artes in Barcelona of 1866, and above all the biographical notes by Ossorio Bernard in his *Galería biográfica* (1868-69), the notes by Folch y Torres of 1926 and those included by Mariano de Madrazo in his *Historia del Museo del Prado. 1818-1868*, published much later in 1945 (*Catálogo de la exposición...*: 1866; OSSORIO BERNARD: 1868, p. 359;

FOLCH Y TORRES: 1926, pp. 1-5; MADRAZO: 1945, pp. 48, 60 and 65; GAYA NUÑO: 1958, p. 215; GARRUT ROMA: 1974, p. 50; TRIADÓ: 1984, p. 264). There are, however, two undisputed facts in the parallel careers of the two artists which distinguish them: firstly, the fact that Lacoma y Fontanet left for Paris in 1805 and although he painted portraits, he did not do so until a later date, while Lacoma y Sans went to Madrid in early 1800 to continue his training at the Academia de San Fernando, dying there at an early age in 1812 after specialising in history and portrait painting.

In late 1804, encouraged by the awards and recognition he had obtained at the Escuela de Nobles Artes in Barcelona, Lacoma applied for a grant from the Barcelona Chamber of Commerce to continue his studies. He arrived in Paris in early 1805, as recorded in a letter by the Spanish ambassador in Paris at the time, Francisco Gravina, who on 14 January 1805 informed the Chamber of Commerce of Lacoma's arrival. Alcolea has suggested that following his arrival in Paris Lacoma applied to be taught by Jacques-Louis David (1748-1825), Antoine-Jean Gros (1771-1835) and the Belgian Gérard van Spaendonck (1746-1822), but this has not been sufficiently clearly demonstrated and his name only appears in the registry of pupils at the École des Beaux-Arts de Paris with the date of 30 August 1806, a fact that does not clearly indicate that he joined the studio of David or any of the other leading Parisian studios of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, such as those of Gros, Guérin or Ingres (AUGÉ Y ROMANENS: 1989; AUGÉ: 1991, pp. 114-131; AUGÉ: 2007, pp. 8-17). It is, however, definitely known that between 1805 and 1814 Lacoma produced some of his finest paintings of flowers and that at this period he started to focus on the genre of portraiture (BERTOMEU SÁNCHEZ y VIDAL HERNÁNDEZ: 2011, pp. 125-33).

Lacoma achieved recognition for his progress in flower painting in 1810 when he was awarded a gold medal at the Parisian Salon for two paintings: one of fruit and the other of a vase of flowers with musical instruments (FLAQUER I REVAUD y PAGÈS I GILIBETS: 1986, pp. 235-236). In early 1814 and probably as the result of political turmoil and his difficult financial situation, Lacoma applied for a post as professor of the flower painting class at the Escuela de Nobles Artes in Barcelona. Before the post was awarded he participated once more at the Salon, this time with a painting of flowers, another of fruit and a portrait of the academician, playwright, poet and critic Jean-François Cailhava de l'Estandoux (1731-1813), who had died the previous year (FLAQUER I REVAUD y PAGÈS I GILIBETS: 1986, p. 236). Nonetheless, despite being appointed to the position

in Barcelona and being awarded special funding to cover his travel costs to that city, Lacoma did not return to Spain until late 1818.

Lacoma's fortunes changed radically when he received the commission - communicated to him by the joint Spanish ambassador in Paris, the Count of Fernán Núñez, to participate in the recovery of paintings removed from Spain by the French, which were at that date in the Musée Napoléon, in a response to the Spanish Royal Decree of 8 May 1814 (STAMPA PIÑEIRO: 2011, pp. 389-402; Archivo Histórico Nacional, Sección Estado, legajo 5299, exp. 34). During this period of time, between the commission received in 1814 from Fernán Núñez and his co-ambassador the Count of Perelada to his return to Spain in 1818, Lacoma painted the portrait of Perelada's wife, Joana de Boxadors, and their children now in the castle of Peralada in Girona (FOLCH Y TORRES: 1953, pp. 21-22).

As noted above, Lacoma arrived at the Spanish court for the first time in late 1818, accompanying the last delivery of paintings from Paris. As a result of his participation in this undertaking he was appointed honorary court painter by Ferdinand VII in early 1819 and received a gratuity of 20,000 *reales de vellón* which he continued to receive throughout his life. That same year he was also made an academician of merit at the Academia de San Fernando in the category of fruit and flower painting. In 1820 Lacoma was made a knight of the Order of the Golden Spur. Shortly afterwards he received the only commission from the monarch arising from his position as court painter, which was a gallery of portraits of the family of Ferdinand VII and his third wife, María Josefa Amalia de Sajonia, which he painted between 1820 and 1823. This series is now in the Casita del Príncipe in El Escorial, together the portraits of the Italian branch of the Bourbons, the Bourbon-Two Sicilies, painted by Giuseppe Martorelli in 1823.

Lacoma remained in Madrid until at least 1823, as demonstrated by the fact that he is referred to in the *Diario de Madrid* on 28 February as mayor of the San Pascual quarter of the city and as living in the "casa de la Relojería" on calle Barquillo. Also documented are various portraits and other works that appeared at public sales but are difficult to date. In general, almost nothing is known of the artist between 1823 and 1826 when he reappeared in Paris and provided information at the request of the embassy on the auction of works by Velázquez and Murillo (MADRAZO: 1884, pp. 265-302; BEROQUI: 1932, pp. 7-21).

Nonetheless, thanks to the inscription on the recently located portrait of the Countess of Trastámara [Figs. 1 and 2], it is now known that the artist was in Paris by April 1825.

Shortly after that, again in Paris, Lacoma painted the present pair of portraits of two as yet unidentified sitters. The stretchers of both works have the stamp of the maker, the Saint-Martin family, which had an establishment called *À la Palette de Rubens* at 6, rue de Seine in Paris (LABREUCHE: 2011). The sitters in these works are very probably the children of one of the Spanish noble families present in the French capital at this period given that other portraits by Lacoma are known of the 14<sup>th</sup> Duke of Villahermosa and his brother, the 9<sup>th</sup> Count of El Real [Fig. 3] and of Joaquín de Carvajal, Count of La Unión [Fig. 4]. These were painted immediately after the present works and were included in the *Exhibition of Portraits of Children in Spain* of 1925 (cat. 126 and 127, pp.86-87, the first pl. XXXVI).

In 1829 Lacoma painted a bouquet of roses and jasmine dedicated to his friend Adèle Cailhava, the daughter of Jean-François Cailhava, with whom Lacoma lived at that point. From the *Annuaire des Artistes* published by Guyot de Fère it is known that in 1832 he moved to 2, rue de Tournon (GUYOT DE FÈRE: 1832, pp.94-95). This publication also states that many of the artist's portraits were reproduced as lithographs by Maurin (whether Nicolas-Eustache or Antoine is not known) and that his paintings were present in important collections in Paris, London, Madrid, Saint Petersburg, Naples and Florence.

At this period Lacoma's name appears among participants in the *tertulias* [informal discussion groups] of the Spanish exiles in Paris in the company of his friend the toxicologist Mateo Orfila, including the one held at the house of Ramón José de Arce (1757-1848). It would seem that it was at this point that he met the banker Alejandro Aguado (1784-1842) from whom he received the commission to paint his portrait and that of his wife and children in 1832 (VILLAESCUSA: 2013). From this point onwards contemporary accounts of the artist refer to a progressive abandonment of his artistic activities in favour of the more lighthearted aspects of his life, in which he is always mentioned in the company of Adèle Cailhava and the by then extremely eminent Orfila. Étienne-Léon de Lamoignon referred to this friendship and to Lacoma's artistic career in his work *L'espion russe* of 1838 in which he states that the deterioration of Lacoma's sight and a certain "nonchalance" explain why he abandoned his career: "on déplore que la faiblesse de sa vue et sa nonchalance le détournent d'un art où il aurait

marché à pas de géant, mais où il a su se donner une place éminente” (LAMOTHE-LANGON: 1838, vol. II. p. 65).

The relationship between Lacoma, Mateo Orfila and Adèle Cailhava must have been truly close. Shortly after the artist’s death in Passy in 1849 Orfila included a written portrait of his friend Lacoma in his memoirs which is truly eulogistic: “Before moving on to another matter, allow me to sketch out a portrait of Lacoma in a few words and to recount all the happiness that we enjoyed over the eight years that we were together. [He was] endowed with a figure both fine and sweet, with a resolute mind and truly remarkable talent as a flower painter. Lacoma never knew hatred; amiable in excess and with a manner as easy as it was agreeable, he was esteemed by all those who knew him; thus, over the course of his life he never experienced any disappointment or serious upset; his spirit, as pure as the sky, never took refuge in ambition or intrigue. Perfect being, after forty years of such a close union, you can count on my unlimited abnegation!”

Alejandro Martínez

PhD



Figs. 1 y 2. Francisco Lacoma y Fontanet. Doña María Luisa de Carvajal y Queralt, condesa de Trastámara. 1825. Óleo sobre lienzo, s. m. Madrid, colección particular.

Ex<sup>ma</sup> S<sup>ra</sup> D<sup>a</sup> María Luisa  
de Carvajal y de Queralt; Condesa  
de Trastámara Marquesa del  
Aguila.  
Por f. Lacoma pintor de Cámara de S.M.C.  
en París 28. de abril de 1825.



Fig. 3. Francisco [Lacoma y Fontanet](#). *El XIV duque de Villaberma y su hermano, el IX conde del Real*. Hacia 1830. Óleo sobre lienzo, s. m. Paradero desconocido. ¶



Fig. 4. Francisco [Lacoma y Fontanet](#). *Luis Joaquín de Carvajal conde de la Unión*. Hacia 1830. Óleo sobre lienzo, s. m. Paradero desconocido. Fototeca del [Institut Amatller](#). ¶

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