

Caylus



ALONSO CANO ALMANSA
(Granada, 1601-1667)

Saint Francis of Assisi in prayer

Ca. 1645-1652

Oil on canvas

81 × 62.5 cm

PROVENANCE:

Evaristo Pérez de Castro (1769-1849), Madrid; his descendants, until sold at Ansorena, 8 April 2021, lot 236.

SOURCES AND DOCUMENTS:

Archivo Histórico de Protocolos de Madrid, *Inventario de los bienes quedados por la muerte del Excmo. Sr. D. Evaristo Pérez de Castro*, prot. 25720, Ansótegui Caruana y Prado, 1850, f. 71-79.

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WETHEY, Harold E. *Alonso Cano. Pintor, escultor y arquitecto*. Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1983.

VILLAFRANCA JIMÉNEZ, M del Mar (ed.). *Alonso Cano: espiritualidad y modernidad artística*. Exhib. cat., Seville: Consejería de Cultura-Junta de Andalucía, 2001.

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Son of the joiner and altarpiece maker Miguel Cano, Alonso and his family moved to Seville in 1614 and in August 1616 he entered Francisco Pacheco's studio. There he coincided with Diego Velázquez, at that point finishing his apprenticeship, and the artists became close and lifelong friends. The first known surviving work by Cano is *Saint Francis Borgia*, dated 1624 (Museo de Bellas Artes de Sevilla), which reveals its dependence on Pacheco in the use line and on the young Velázquez, Cano's fellow student, in the tenebrist lighting. Cano's activities as a painter, sculptor and architectural designer make him one of the most unique figures in 17th-century Spanish art. The tormented artist was a highly active, violent and irritable individual whose life was filled with dramatic episodes, a reality that did not prevent him from producing art of an exquisite sensibility. In Madrid Cano's style moved rapidly away from the intense naturalism of his Seville period. The paintings that he restored following the fire at the Bueno Retiro palace in 1640 allowed him to assimilate aspects of the Italian and Flemish pictorial techniques. From that point onwards his brushwork came closer to that of the

16th-century Venetian painters while Van Dyck inspired his elegant forms and transparent tonalities.

It is thought that Cano left Madrid and was in Valencia from 1644-45 after the violent death of his second wife. Interrogated under torture, he was absolved of participation in the murder and in September 1645 he was once again in Madrid. The unpublished *Saint Francis of Assisi* presented here can be considered to date from that period in Madrid, the artist's most productive when he executed numerous works of high quality such as *The Virgin and Child* or *Virgin of the Star* (1645-52, fig. 1), in which the typically Venetian loose brushstroke, glazes and sparkling light are fully integrated into the artist's own style. The present work was in the collection of the politician and diplomat Evaristo Pérez de Castro (1769-1849), an art lover and academician of honour of the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando whose collection included Caravaggio's celebrated *Ecce Homo* that recently reappeared at public auction in Madrid.

Cano's work was influential in Madrid and particularly in Granada. Sebastián de Herrera Barnuevo was his principal studio assistant and close follower at court and he also influenced Juan Antonio Escalante and other painters. All the painters and sculptors active in Granada and Malaga in the second half of the 17th century can be considered followers of Cano, including Juan de Sevilla, Atanasio Bocanegra and Niño de Guevara among the painters, and Pedro de Mena and José de Mora among the sculptors, while Cano was a reference and model for numerous other artists.



Fig. 1. Alonso Cano, *The Virgin and Child* or *Virgin of the Star*, 1645-52, oil on canvas, 166 × 109.6 cm. Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado (inv. P000630)