

# Caylus



**ALONSO CANO ALMANSA**  
(Granada, 1601-1667)

*The Good Shepherd*

1657

Oil on pine panel

27.5 × 22 cm

#### PROVENANCE:

Saint Francis Altarpiece in Santiago Church, Madrid, 1657;

Private collection, Paris.

#### DOCUMENTARY SOURCES:

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#### LITERATURE:

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Son of the carpenter and altarpiece assembler Miguel Cano, the young Alonso and his family moved to Seville in 1614 and in August 1616 he entered Francisco Pacheco's workshop. There he coincided with Diego Velázquez, who was completing his apprenticeship at the time. His first known painting is a Saint Francis of Borgia dated 1624 (Museo de Bellas Artes, Seville), which reveals his dependence on both Pacheco and the young Velázquez. Cano's activities as a painter, sculptor and draughtsman make him one of the most singular figures in 17th-century Spanish art. He was a very active, violent and irritable individual whose life was full of dramatic episodes, a reality that did not prevent him from producing art of exquisite sensitivity.

In Madrid, Cano's style quickly moved away from the intense naturalism of his Sevillian period. The paintings he restored after the fire in the Buen Retiro palace in 1640 enabled him to assimilate aspects of Italian and Flemish painting techniques. From then onwards, his brushstrokes approached those of the 16th-century Venetian painters, while Van Dyck inspired his elegant forms and transparent tones. Cano is believed to have left Madrid and stayed in Valencia between 1644 and 1645 after the violent death of his second wife. Questioned under torture, he was acquitted of his involvement in the murder and in September 1645 he was back in Madrid.

Cano produced two paintings for the altarpiece of San Francisco in the parish church of Santiago in Madrid in the 1650s. The former parish church of Santiago formed part of the early medieval Christian nucleus of the town, along with five other churches. Its importance was intensified due to its proximity to the Alcazar and thanks to the particular support it received from several monarchs, among them Philip II, who was said to have a special devotion for the image of the Virgin of Hope that was venerated there. Precisely the proximity to the residence of the Habsburgs meant that throughout the 17th century various reforms were proposed at the head of the temple, aimed at widening a back alleyway, regularising it with respect to the borders of the houses of the Count of Lemos.

The planning was the responsibility of Juan Gómez de Mora, who signed two projects between 1642 and 1648.

The importance of the project lies in the fact that the new configuration of the chancel was to determine the restructuring of the presbytery and adjoining chapels, as well as the location of the altarpieces, including the one dedicated to Saint Francis. Cano produced two paintings, one representing the saint to whom the altarpiece was dedicated - Saint Francis ; Rodríguez Rebollo suggested in 2002 that now is at the Palacio Arzobispal in Madrid [Fig. 1] - and another, smaller, for the door of the tabernacle, representing the Good Shepherd. Palomino acknowledged this, and was one of the first authors to praise the result: "No less worthy of immortal applause is that of Our Seraphic Father Saint Francis, when the Angel showed him the water bottle (symbol of the purity that the priest must have), which is on the side of the Epistle in the parish church of Santiago; as is the Good Shepherd below, on the small board of the tabernacle, which is a primor".



Fig. 1. Alonso Cano, *Saint Francis of Assisi*, oil on canvas, ca. 1657-1658, 162 × 125 cm. Madrid, Palacio Arzobispal; Alonso Cano, *Saint Francis of Assisi*, pencil and brownish watercolour on paper, 1657. New York, The Pierpont Morgan Library.