

Caylus



VICENTE LÓPEZ PORTAÑA
(Valencia, 1772 – Madrid, 1850)

Presumed Portrait of José Higinio Arche

1841

Oil on canvas
114.6 x 87.3 cm

Signed: «Vic^{te} Lopez F^t. 1841.»

Inscription: «ORDEN[ANZA] / DE LA REAL CASA / Y PATRIMONIO.»

Born in Valencia on 19 September 1772, Vicente López began his training as a pupil of the Franciscan Antonio de Villanueva at the Academia de San Carlos in Valencia, where in 1789 he was awarded the First Class Prize for his canvas *King Ezekeiel vaunting his Wealth* (Museo de Bellas Artes de Valencia San Pío V), earning him 40 *pesos* and a grant to study in Madrid. Having settled in the capital, the following year he won first prize in the competition organised by the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando for his painting *The Catholic Kings receiving a diplomatic Mission from the King of Fez* (Museo de la RABASF). As a student at the Academia López assimilated with enormous fidelity the academic teachings inherited from Mengs via Mariano Salvador Maella, whose colourful Baroque compositions he quickly made his own, together with the use of a precise and analytical style of drawing as the preferred medium for preliminary studies for paintings. López was also dazzled by the Baroque grandeur of the frescoes by Luca Giordano that he saw in the royal residences, which had a decisive influence on the aesthetic language of his own compositions.

Within Vicente López's lengthy career and large oeuvre his portraits are undoubtedly particularly notable and this is a previously unpublished example. Presumed to depict José Higinio Arche, it is signed and dated 1841 just before López reached his seventieth year. The identification of the sitter, whose birth and death dates are not precisely known, is based on the attributes seen in the image. He is shown as elegantly dressed as befits the holder of a high administrative post, standing and surrounded by pieces of paper and bundles of documents relating to his work. From among these pieces of paper he points to one on the desk on which is written "ORDEN[ANZA] / DE LA REAL CASA / Y PATRIMONIO". This refers to the *Ordenanza General para el Gobierno y Administración de la Real Casa* [figs. 1 and 2] ¹, drawn up by the government at the request of Isabel II and published in Madrid in 1840. The *Ordenanza* was a set of internal regulations for the correct functioning of the different levels of the Administration of the Royal Household. As such, it can be suggested that the sitter in this portrait is associated with the composition or implementation of these rules, a responsibility corresponding to the head of the Intendencia General de la Real Casa y Patrimonio, the department that supervised the financial management of the royal assets and estates.

Reference to the *Guía de forasteros de Madrid*, among other sources, reveals that two people headed the Intendente General in 1841: José Higinio Arche (from 20 October 1840

¹ Published in Madrid by Eusebio Aguado, Court Printer to His Majesty. The original manuscript is in the Archivo General de Palacio: AGP, AG, leg. 924.

to 31 July 1841), and Martín de los Heros (from 31 July 1841 to 4 August 1843). The latter was 58 at this date, an age that does not correspond to this sitter's appearance. Although Higinio Arche's exact age at this moment is not known, his career up to that point suggests a middle-aged man: he began as a provincial governor from the 1830s; he was then Chief Accountant of the Caja Nacional de Amortización [Royal Bonds Repayment Office]; Governor of the Royal Household; Intendente de la Real Casa [Chief financial supervisor of royal assets]; and in 1844 he achieved the position of Director General of the Caja Nacional de Amortización.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2