

Virgin and Child

ca. 1650

Oil on canvas, 113.5 x 85.5 cm

Stedelijk Museum Wuyts-Van Campen en Baron Caroly, Lier

Inv. no. 75

PROVENANCE

Aguado collection, Marquess of the Marismas, Paris, 1839-43; Aguado sale, lot 36, Paris, March 20, 1843; Hendrick Wuyts, Antwerp; Bosmans, Antwerp; Baron Caroly, Antwerp, by 1935; bequeathed to Stedelijk Museum Wuyts-Van Campen en Baron Caroly, Lier, 1935

The theme of the Virgin and Child was taken up by Murillo throughout his career in a series of paintings destined for private devotion and that form an important group within his oeuvre. Ressort has classified them into three large groups that correspond *grosso modo* to three important phases in the stylistic evolution of his work.¹ As Navarrete has pointed out, the Lier painting can easily be included among his first productions, if not his first. Angulo dated it to around 1650, in opposition to Mayer's dating of ca. 1660. Angulo's date is confirmed through a formal analysis of the work. The Virgin appears in three-quarters, seated with the Child on her lap. He, in turn, is seated on a white cloth that she holds in both hands. Its composition closely relates it to the *Virgin of the Rosary* in the Musée de Castres [cat. 22] and to the painting of the same subject in the Palazzo Pitti [fig. 187], both also dated to about 1650. In the Castres painting, the Christ Child has the same face and almost identical pose. In place of the rosary, the Child holds an apple between his hands – symbol of the redemption of original sin – but the facial expression of the head resting on the mother's breast is the same. The Virgin's pose, on the other hand, bears a greater similarity to the Florence painting, where she also looks tenderly at the viewer, while in the Castres work she appears absorbed in thought. It is a good example of how Murillo manages to avoid repeating himself through infinite variations.

As for the rest of the painting, a more crowded framing crops the composition at the bottom in comparison with the other two, which grants it a greater austerity as less attention is given to the draping of the cloak that covers the Virgin's legs and the spatial reference of the stone bench on which she is seated has been removed. The coloring is also much more sober as the drapery does not show the sheen and sumptuousness seen in the others, thus announcing a tendency to abandon the naturalism that is generalized in his later work.² This last detail reinforces the tenebrist component that characterizes Murillo's works from these years, as is the case with the *Holy Family with Small Bird* [cat. 20]. The young Murillo's style is evident in the Lier painting in the weakly illuminated

figures who are cropped against a neutral background and whose volume is asserted through impasted brushwork, especially noticeable in the treatment of the Child's white tunic and his mother's shawl.

As pointed out by critics, this orientation towards naturalism after his first works must have occurred as a result of his study of the major Sevillian painters of the first half of the century, principally Roelas and Zurbarán. However, the Virgin of Lier should mainly be related to his master Juan del Castillo. In particular, the connection is evident in the *Virgin of the Rosary* from Carmona, ca. 1625, especially in the Virgin's hands and the Child's pose.³ The overall composition, the framing and the choice of a neutral background, in exchange, reveal a clearer relation to the *Virgin of the Rosary* in a Seville collection.⁴ In any case, in both paintings the figures already present the same kindness and sweetness that made Murillo famous. Nevertheless, the composition also reveals a relationship to Zurbarán's *Virgin of the Rosary* in the Cathedral of Seville, which has been dated to ca. 1630.⁵

However, the Lier Virgin also has ties to the work of Roelas, whether through Castillo and Zurbarán or directly through the Roelas' Sevillian works. To this effect, the composition and framing of the *Virgin and Child* in the Royal Alcazar of Seville should be noted, as it probably occupies a place in the origins of those by Castillo and Zurbarán.⁶ Even clearer to us is the connection to the *Holy Family with St Anne and the Young St John* in the Asturias Fine Arts Museum, Oviedo, and the *Holy Family in the Casa Cuna*, Seville, which has been proposed as a precedent for the art developed by Murillo.⁷ In any case, the tight framing, the naturalistic treatment and the chiaroscuro effects are the same utilized by Murillo in the Lier work. One last factor should be pointed out, one that carried great weight in the development of Sevillian naturalism and that Murillo takes up again in his youth: Orazio Borgianni's *Holy Family with St Anne*, which is also stylistically related to the Lier Virgin.⁸

As for the provenance of the painting, nothing is known prior to its appearance in the Aguado collection. However, it is possible that it is one of the Virgin and Child paintings that Palomino cites in various Madrid collections.⁹ The Lier Virgin occupied a place of privilege in the Aguado collection, as revealed by the fact that it was engraved by Lefèvre for the collection's catalogue, written by Louis Viardot, who published the text in a separate edition.¹⁰ The work was sold with the rest of the collection in the Paris sale of March 20, 1843, where it reached the sum of 2,790 francs.

The painting entered the Lier museum in 1935, part of the bequest of Georges Caroly (1862-1936).¹¹ Thanks to the label preserved on the back of the painting,¹² it is known that it previously belonged to his grandfather, Dr. Jan Gerard Bosmans, and the widow of his great-uncle Hendrik Wuyts. The 1877 exhibition noted that the painting was still in the Antwerp collection of Mrs. Wuyts.¹³ It is most likely Hendrik Wuyts who acquired the painting at the Aguado sale. Later, it was passed down to the Bosmans, his sister and brother-in-law, and from them to Baron Caroly, their grandson. In 1944, the Institut royal du Patrimoine artistique,

Brussels, photographed the work for their records and it was these photos that Angulo published in his monograph. The information on its provenance may have led Angulo to identify the painting as being in Brussels. The work has recently been cleaned, returning to it all of its chromatic intensity and reinforcing the potent chiaroscuro effect. [E. L. D.]

¹ Ressort 1983, pp. 23-4.

² Angulo relates the style of the drapery in Castres and Florence with the possible influence of Genovese painting, particularly that of Strozzi. Angulo 1981, vol. I, p. 274.

³ Valdivieso/Serrera 1985, 1985, no. 112.

⁴ Angulo 1981, vol. I, p. 270.

⁵ Seville 1982, no. 18.

⁶ Seville 2008, cat. 25.

⁷ Seville/Bilbao 2005, cat. 3.

⁸ This painting, in a private collection, was in Seville in 1830 in Julian Williams' collection and it is possible that it was already in the city in the 17th century.

⁹ Palomino 1947, pp. 1032-3.

¹⁰ Viardot 1839.

¹¹ The Caroly collection is being studied by Luc Coenen, curator at the Lier museum, to whom we owe this information; his research will undoubtedly provide new information in this regard.

¹² The following inscription also appears on the label: "no. 6." The recent cleaning to which the canvas has been subjected has uncovered another inscription painted on the lower left corner: "210."

¹³ Antwerp 1877, no. 510.

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Virgin of the Rosary

ca. 1650

Oil on canvas, 166.3 x 123.3 cm

Musée Goya, Castres. Deposit of the Musée du Louvre, Paris, 1949

Inv. no. 929 D.49.3.1

PROVENANCE

Acquired by Langlois (from Naples) in Spain, 18th century; Randon de Boisset, Paris, until 1777; auctioned for 11,000 pounds at Randon de Boisset sale, Paris, lot 18, February 27, 1777; count de Vaudreuil, Paris, until 1784; auctioned for 9,001 pounds at count de Vaudreuil sale, Lebrun, Paris, November 24, 1784; acquired by King Louis XVI, Paris, 1777; French royal collection, Paris; Musée Napoléon, no. 1056, Paris, 1811; Musée du Louvre, Paris

The representation of the Virgin with Child as a devotion image goes back in Spain to the Middle Ages (Saint Dominic), particularly to the 14th and 15th centuries, and then to the 16th century thanks to the instauration in 1573 of the festivity of the Rosary by Pope Gregory XIII. Given the importance of Marian devotion, this image naturally finds its place in the altarpieces decorating churches.

As all great masters of the Golden Century, Murillo was commissioned (mostly by the Dominicans in Seville) many paintings on this subject; about twenty are known in all, starting with the very earliest one kept in the Fine Arts Museum of Seville (ca. 1640) all the way to the version in the Wallace Collection in London. The artist therefore kept coming back throughout his career to this charming image full of sweetness and mysticism.

The *Virgin with Child* kept in the Goya Museum of Castres is amongst the first in the series painted in the 1650s, together with the first version kept in the Palazzo Pitti in Florence [fig. 187]. The commissioner is unknown, but the work left Spain in the 18th century thanks to the Neapolitan Langlois. It was subsequently owned by financier Randon de Boisset and the Count of Vaudreuil, and later acquired by King Louis XVI in 1784. In 1792, when Crown properties were nationalised during the French Revolution, it became part of the national collections. The study of this work and its comparison with its sister works shows that Murillo never repeats the exact composition, even if the context is very often similar: the Virgin is sitting on a stone bench, holding the Child Jesus on her knees. The Castres version is still infused with tenebrism, since both characters stand out on a dark and subtle background. Little by little, Murillo abandons monumental forms and the ample folds in clothing to give greater importance to the quality of expressions and to the movement of the Child Jesus standing on his mother's knees (second version of the Palazzo Pitti). Although the frontal position remains the most common one, Murillo sometimes rotates the bust of the Virgin (Birmingham version, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)

El joven Murillo



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