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Joaquín Domínguez Bécquer
*Portrait of the Duchess of Montpensier,* 1853

JOAQUÍN DOMÍNGUEZ BÉCQUER
(Seville 1817 – 1879 Seville)

*PORTRAIT OF THE DUCHESS OF MONTPENSIER*, 1853

Signed and dated lower left: '*Joaq. D. Becquer.* / *Sevilla 1853*'

Oil on canvas
193 x 116 cm
76 x 45 ⅝ in.

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**Provenance**

Marquesa de los Ríos, Seville;
Acquired from the above by a member of the García Huidobro family;
With an art dealer, Madrid;
Private collection.

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**Literature**

Piñanes García-Olías, M. (ed.), *Los Bécquer. Un linaje de artistas*, exh. cat., Museo de Bellas Artes de Sevilla, Seville, 2025, no. 21, illustrated.

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**Exhibitions**

*Los Bécquer. Un linaje de artistas*, Museo de Bellas Artes de Sevilla, Seville, 2 December 2025 – 15 March 2026.



Painted in 1853, the portrait shows the twenty-one-year-old Infanta María Luisa Fernanda (1832 – 1897) - sister of Queen Isabel II of Spain and, since 1846, wife of Antoine d'Orléans, Duc de Montpensier - standing three-quarter right upon the riverside terrace of the Palacio de San Telmo, her principal Andalusian residence. She wears a complete ensemble of black silk trimmed with jet, a lace *mantilla* drawn high over the coifed hair, framing her pale, composed face, while wrist-length crochet mitts enclose her hands. In the right she supports a delicately painted wooden fan, in the left she gathers a folded *pañuelo* of needle-made lace.

This stark black attire may not be mere fashion choice, but it is likely to signify mourning. Notably, her brother-in-law Ferdinand Philippe, Duke of Orléans (the "Prince Royal" of France and eldest brother of her husband Antoine) had died tragically young in a carriage accident in 1842. Within the Spanish Royal Family, too, conventions often called for prolonged mourning dress after the passing of close kin. Bécquer had depicted the Duchess in similar mourning garb in an 1849 portrait, representing María Luisa Fernanda in the Alcázar gardens cradling her baby daughter, already clothed in dark tones (fig. 1). The dress also reflects the fashion of Sevillian and Andalusian women, influenced by descriptions of female attire provided by Antonio de Latour, tutor to the duke, in works such as *Voyage en Andalousie* (1848). The making of the lace dress was entrusted to the tailor Domingo Margarit, who maintained workshops in Barcelona and Madrid and corresponded with the Palace of San Telmo until 1851, sending designs for the garment. It consisted of four flounces - bodice, sleeves, bertha and skirt. For the skirt alone, where the flounces were attached, more than nine *varas* of fabric were used.[1] The thriving Sevillian trade of the period supplied the infanta with fabrics, ornaments and accessories for her wardrobe. Gloves were purchased from the shop of Federico and Pablo Gely on Calle Sierpes, while parasols and fans came from Vides y Terán, also located at number 81 Calle Sierpes.[2]

Despite the somber dress, she gazes outward with a calm, steady expression, her cheeks softly rouged. Her dark hair is centrally parted in the Spanish style and gathered back, but one noticeable detail is a single curl that falls along the side of her face.

Behind her, to the left, rises a carved sandstone krater raked by late afternoon light; to the right, beyond banks of river reeds and luxuriant trees, is discernible the south-

[1] In the Archive of the Fundación Infantes Duques de Montpensier, the value of this lace is recorded at six thousand reales de vellón; the tailor also requested to be granted the title of "Supplier to Their Royal Highnesses" (AFIDM, Leg. 471, 10). See Piñanes García-Olías, M. (ed.), *Los Bécquer. Un linaje de artistas*, exh. cat., Museo de Bellas Artes de Sevilla, Seville, 2025, no. 21.

[2] The aforementioned archive of the Fundación Infantes Duques de Montpensier preserves a vast number of invoices related to dressmaking and the wardrobes of the infanta and her daughters, underscoring how the city experienced a flourishing revival under the protection of the royal couple.

eastern range of San Telmo with its watch-turret roof and the church of the convent of Los Remedios. Between these two points, the viewer is invited to discern the course of the river, where the masts of two vessels can be seen. The motif is a subtle allusion to the modern vessels the Montpensiers employed for travel between Seville and their summer palace Sanlúcar after the closure, in 1852, of the *Real Compañía de Navegación del Guadalquivir*.[3] A comparable boat can be seen in this 1851 view of Sevilla, by Manuel Barrón (fig. 2). It is worth quoting the newspaper account of the return to Seville of the infantas and infantes after their summer in Sanlúcar:

> *On Sunday, at half past three in the afternoon* - writes the chronicler -*, as had been announced, Their Royal Highnesses the Dukes of Montpensier arrived from Sanlúcar on board the steamer "San Telmo". The berth for said vessel was elegantly adorned with arches of flowers and flags, its floor covered with carpets and an abundance of potted plants*.[4]

In 1853, Alfred Dehodencq painted for the couple a family portrait set on the same riverside terraces at San Telmo (fig. 3).

Born an Infanta of Spain, María Luisa's marriage to Antoine d'Orléans (youngest son of King Louis-Philippe of France), was orchestrated as part of complex European negotiations over the Spanish succession. In August 1845, Queen Victoria and King Louis-Philippe met at the Château d'Eu to settle the "Spanish marriages."[5] They agreed that the teenage Queen Isabel II would marry a Spanish Bourbon cousin, and Isabel's sister Luisa Fernanda would wed Montpensier. Despite a stipulation (sought by Britain) that Luisa's marriage occur only after Isabel had produced an heir, Louis-Philippe pressed ahead. The Duke of Montpensier secretly secured a betrothal in 1845, and the double wedding was celebrated in Madrid on 10 October 1846, to Britain's displeasure.

This portrait was painted just a few years later, after dramatic changes in the couple's fortunes. The 1848 Revolution in Paris toppled the July Monarchy of Louis-Philippe, abruptly ending Montpensier's prospects in France. The exiled Duke and Duchess hastened to Spain, arriving in Madrid in early 1848. In mid-1849 the Duke and Duchess relocated to Seville. In June they purchased the Palacio de San Telmo on the banks of the Guadalquivir in Seville as their official residence. By September 1849 they had taken up residence in San Telmo, after spending that summer in the seaside town of Sanlúcar de Barrameda. That same year, their first child, Infanta María Isabel,

[3] See Morales Padrón, M., 'Breve historia de la navegación por la ría del Guadalquivir y puerto de Sevilla', *Tabularium Edit*, vol. 1, no. 11, 2024, pp. 339–354.
[4] *El Porvenir*, 27 September 1859, translated by the author.
[5] See Guymer, L., 'The Wedding Planners: Lord Aberdeen, Henry Bulwer, and the Spanish Marriages, 1841–1846', *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 2010, pp. 549–573.

was born in Seville. Settled there, the Montpensier couple cultivated a princely court in miniature, often referred to by contemporaries as the "corte chica". In 1850–51 they constructed a lavish summer palace in Sanlúcar (the Palacio de Orleans-Borbón) surrounded by extensive gardens. They acquired adjacent lands, including the former Botanical Garden *La Paz* to supply water for their parks, and invested in local infrastructure. The gardens of San Telmo were carefully cultivated under the Duchess's supervision, with exotic plantings and design by French landscapers Lecolant and Hubert. Moreover, the Duke became a major shareholder of the Guadalquivir Steam Navigation Company, enabling improved river transport between Seville and Sanlúcar.[6] This patronage modernized travel: summer excursions by steamboat between their residences became a hallmark of the ducal lifestyle, after the state-run Real Compañía de Navegación del Guadalquivir had closed in 1852.

The Duke and Duchess acted as munificent patrons of the arts and letters, fostering a true centre of culture and artistic and literary patronage in Andalusia.[7] Their circle included leading Spanish writers like Cecilia Böhl de Faber and Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, as well as visiting French literati such as Prosper Mérimée, Théophile Gautier, and Alexandre Dumas. The visual arts similarly flourished at San Telmo. Many prominent Sevillian painters of the Romantic era received ducal commissions or appointments, among them Antonio María Esquivel, Manuel Barrón, José María Escacena, Eduardo Cano, and the Bécquer family of artists. Indeed, Eugène Delacroix himself and other noted painters reportedly spent time at San Telmo copying masterpieces in the ducal art collections. The Montpensiers amassed a notable art collection, acquiring Old Masters (El Greco, Goya…) and contemporary works to decorate their palaces.

Within this milieu, Joaquín Domínguez Bécquer (1817–1879) rose to special prominence as the Montpensiers' favoured painter.[8] A native Sevillian, Bécquer was a leading artist of the Romantic-costumbrista school. His connection to the ducal household began as soon as they arrived in Seville. The Montpensiers first met Bécquer while residing in the Alcázar in 1848–49, purchasing several of his works and commissioning drawings. Bécquer's relationship with the Montpensiers continued unbroken for three decades, as he received a steady stream of commissions up until his death. After the couple moved into San Telmo palace in late 1849, Bécquer became a fixture at their court. He not only provided historical and genre paintings to adorn their residence but also took on the role of drawing master to the young

[6] See Comas, J., 'Los Montpensier y Sanlúcar de Barrameda: los orígenes de los veranos de la sociedad sevillana', *Revista Escaparate*, 2023.
[7] See Barberán, V. G., *La Sevilla de los Montpensier*, Seville, 1997, pp. 162 ff.
[8] On Domínguez Bécquer's career see Calero, G. P., 'Pintura decimonónica en la corte sevillana de los Duques de Montpensier', in *El siglo XIX: el arte en la corte española y en las nuevas colecciones peninsulares*, Zaragoza, 2019, pp. 185–199.

infantas.[9] Recognizing his talents, Queen Isabel II in 1850 named Bécquer an *honorary Pintor de Cámara* (court painter) to the Crown – a distinction he held alongside his *de facto* position as painter in residence at San Telmo.[10] By the mid-1850s, Joaquín Domínguez Bécquer was arguably the leading portraitist in Seville, representing Spain in the 1855 Exposition Universelle in Paris and helping organize art preservation efforts in his city.[11] It was in this context, under the Montpensiers' patronage, that Bécquer painted the *Retrato de la duquesa de Montpensier* in 1853.

[9] Rubio Jiménez, J. and Piñanes García-Olías, M., *Joaquín Domínguez Bécquer. El guardián del Real Alcázar de Sevilla*, Seville, 2014, p. 97.
[10] Ibid., p. 58.
[11] Ibid., pp. 41–41.



Fig. 1: Joaquín Domínguez Bécquer, *Portrait of the Duchess of Montpensier in the Gardens of the Alcázar*, 1849, oil on canvas, Private collection, Sanlúcar de Barrameda



Fig. 2: Manuel Barrón, *View of Seville*, 1851, oil on canvas, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Havana



Fig. 3: Alfred Dehodencq, *The Duke and Duchess of Montpensier and their Children in the Gardens of the San Telmo Palace, Seville*, 1853, oil on canvas, Private collection

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