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Vicente López Portaña
Isabel II as a Child, Seated on the Throne, ca. 1835–37

VICENTE LÓPEZ PORTAÑA
(Valencia 1772 – 1850 Madrid)

ISABEL II AS A CHILD, SEATED ON THE THRONE, CA. 1835–37

Oil on canvas (oval)
99 x 82 cm
39 x 32 ¼ in.

Provenance

José Bertrán y Musitú (1875–1957), Barcelona, by 1910;
Thence by descent in the Bertrán Collection, Barcelona.

Literature

Aguilera, E. M., *Vicente López*, Madrid, 1946, p. 20, pl. 21;
Angulo Íñiguez, D., *Vicente López: su obra*, Madrid, 1973, p. 16;
Morales y Marín, J. L., *Vicente López*, Zaragoza, 1980, p. 95, no. 216;
Monreal y Tejada, L., *Casa Bertrán en San Gervasio*, Barcelona, 1985, p. 132, no. 42;
Díez, J. L., *Vicente López (1772–1850)*, 2 vols., Madrid, Fundación de Apoyo a la Historia del Arte Hispánico, 1999, vol. II, *Catálogo razonado*, p. 100, no. P-397, pl. 234.

Exhibitions

Exposición de retratos y dibujos antiguos y modernos, Barcelona, 1910, no. 22;
Vicente López, Palacio de la Virreina, Barcelona, 1943, no. 5.



The queen is seated on a gilt throne upholstered in red damask, wearing a satin gown trimmed with blonde lace and the sash of the Order of Maria Luisa knotted beneath the breast. Her hair is gathered into a bun and dressed with a small pearl diadem; she wears pearl earrings and a pearl necklace. Her right hand rests upon the royal crown, placed together with the sceptre on a cushion beside her, while her left hand rests on the arm of the throne, partly concealed by an ermine mantle. A drawn curtain serves as a canopy behind the sitter. The plain wall beyond is broken only by a fragment of a column, the sole decorative note in an otherwise sober setting appropriate to an official image of state.

Executed circa 1835–37, this oval portrait of the child queen Isabel II represents the third of the official prototypes developed for her image following her accession in 1833 and is the only surviving version of this particular model considered autograph.[1] Several period and later copies are recorded, evidencing the wide diffusion this image received as an instrument of dynastic legitimacy for the young sovereign at a moment of acute political fragility, her succession having been immediately contested by the Carlist claim to the throne. The queen's hand resting on the crown works as an assertion of legitimate possession, aimed squarely at the rival claim of her uncle, the Infante Carlos María Isidro, who had plunged Spain into civil war.

The picture was painted at a critical juncture in Vicente López's long career as First Painter to the Crown. Appointed *Primer Pintor de Cámara* under Fernando VII in 1815, López found his position considerably less secure following the king's death in 1833. The regent María Cristina, wary of Carlist sympathies within the royal household, ordered a formal enquiry into the political loyalties of palace staff in 1834, the very year in which the present portrait was likely begun, and López himself was variously reported by different police commissioners as "very disaffected" and "very Carlist," even as his own sons were provisionally marked for removal from their posts.[2] López weathered the investigation and retained his position, and the present canvas belongs precisely to the surge of royal commissions he undertook in these years to furnish the new, constitutional monarchy with an urgently needed official iconography, work that has sometimes, not unreasonably, been read as a deliberate demonstration of loyalty at a moment when his continued tenure was genuinely in question.

Stylistically, the present portrait reflects the graceful, decorative strand of Spanish academic painting descending from Anton Raphael Mengs through Mariano Salvador Maella, López's principal formative influence at the Madrid court in his youth. The device of the drawn curtain behind the sitter, its folds catching warm, glowing

[1] Díez, J. L., *Vicente López (1772–1850)*, 2 vols., Madrid, 1999, vol. II, *Catálogo razonado*, p. 100.
[2] Díez, J. L., *Vicente López (1772–1850)*, 2 vols., Madrid, 1999, vol. I, *Vida y obra*, pp. 191–192.

reflections, derives directly from Maella's own palette and had already become by this date one of the most recognisable signatures of López's mature portrait manner. The oval format, too, follows a long-established convention for state portraiture reaching back into the eighteenth century, its self-contained, emblematic frame particularly suited to an image intended for serial reproduction and wide institutional distribution. Contemporary critics discussing comparable royal portraits by López were careful to distinguish his manner from the severe archaeologising classicism of Jacques-Louis David, finding him closer in spirit to Mengs, or even, in the delicacy of his handling, to the English portraitist Thomas Lawrence.[3] The present canvas, with its softly modelled flesh tones and an echo of rococo elegance in the treatment of lace and satin, exemplifies precisely this position between eighteenth-century courtly refinement and the more sober clarity demanded by official nineteenth-century portraiture.

Among the recorded period and later copies of this prototype two are in Madrid, one at the *Museo del Romanticismo* (fig. 1), considered autograph by Morales in 1980 (though now catalogued by the museum itself as a work by a follower), and one at the *Museo del Ejército*, there regarded as an original, while a further replica in Havana, which Díez considers almost entirely autograph, attests to the closeness with which López's own studio adhered to the prime version even at one remove from it. A smaller version (fig. 2), formerly in the collection of Mercedes Chacón y Silva at the Cartuja de Valldemossa, was recorded in the 1948 inventory of that collection as attributed to Vicente López himself, an error likely encouraged by the frame's inscription, which bears Vicente's dates. It has since been recatalogued by Alcalá Subastas as the work of his son, Bernardo López Piquer (1799–1874), who trained in his father's studio, assisted him on royal commissions at the Palacio Real, and later succeeded him as First Painter to Isabel II in 1858, eight years after Vicente's death. This last version stands as a telling instance of the prototype's afterlife within López's own workshop and family circle, and its misattribution over the course of a century is a reminder of how closely father and son's hands, and reputations, remained entwined.

[3] Ibid., vol. I, p. 244.



Fig. 1: Follower of Vicente López Portaña, *Isabel II as a Child*, oil on canvas, 109 x 78 cm (42 ⅞ x 30 ¾ in.), Museo del Romanticismo, Madrid



Fig. 2: Bernardo López Piquer, *Portrait of Isabel II as a Child*, oil on canvas, 64 x 53 cm (25 ¼ x 20 ⅞ in.), private collection

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