COLNAGHI



Circle of Francisco de Zurbarán

Saint Agnes

CIRCLE OF FRANCISCO DE ZURBARÁN
(Fuente de Cantos 1598 – 1664 Madrid)

SAINT AGNES

Inscribed upper left: '*S. INES*'

Oil on canvas
165 x 102 cm
65 x 40 ⅛ in.

Provenance

Bertrán collection, Casa Bertrán en San Gervasio, Barcelona, by 1985.

Literature

Monreal y Tejada, L., *Casa Bertrán en San Gervasio*, Barcelona, 1985, pp. 66–68, no. 13, reproduced p. 67 (as Francisco de Zurbarán);
Delenda, O., *Francisco de Zurbarán, 1598–1664*, vol. II, *Los conjuntos y el obrador*, Madrid, Fundación de Apoyo a la Historia del Arte Hispánico, 2010, p. 410, no. II-118, reproduced (as Circle of Zurbarán).


S. INES

Standing full length against a dark, subtly graduated ground, the saint is identified by the inscription at upper left and by the lamb at her feet, which signifies her purity while alluding to the verbal association between Agnes and the Latin *agnus*. The towering palm records her martyrdom. Her sumptuous contemporary costume – a dark green bodice and brown skirt enriched with gold embroidery, a lace collar and a scarlet mantle – places the work within Zurbarán's celebrated conception of female saints as solemn presences endowed with the immediacy of portraiture, a mode of representation for which the term *retrato a lo divino* (divine portrait) has since been coined.[1]

Large-format saints of this kind were frequently conceived within Zurbarán's Sevillian orbit in series for churches, hospitals and convents, and the type also enjoyed considerable success in Spanish America. In 1647 Zurbarán contracted with the Abbess of the Convent of La Encarnación, in Lima, to supply twenty-five life-size images of virgin saints. A further contract of 1649 with Buenos Aires patrons included, among a larger consignment of religious and secular subjects, fifteen further pictures of virgin martyrs.[2] The full-length female saint, isolated against a plain ground and identified by inscription and attribute alone, was thus one of the most exportable and repeatable formulae to emerge from Zurbarán's workshop.

Monreal y Tejada first published the present painting in 1985 as an unrecorded autograph work, observing that its composition corresponded to none of the known treatments of Saint Agnes. He associated its dimensions with Zurbarán's monumental series and suggested, more tentatively, that it might have belonged to a dispersed ensemble, perhaps related to the saints carried to France by Marshal Soult during the Peninsular War, a hypothesis for which there is at least one well-documented parallel, a *Saint Casilda* by Zurbarán that was likewise looted by Soult and sold at the 1852 Paris auction of his collection (fig. 1).[3] Monreal also compared its pyramidal construction with the Prado's *Saint Elizabeth of Portugal*, then still identified as Saint Casilda (fig. 2), a confusion the Prado itself has since resolved, noting that while both saints share the attribute of roses concealed in the lap, Casilda is conventionally shown with more youthful features, whereas the Prado's sitter is crowned, richly dressed, and evidently mature, identifying her instead as the sainted Queen of Portugal.[4]

[1] Borobia, M., 'Santa Casilda', catalogue entry, Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid, inv. no. 448 (1979.26).
[2] López Martínez, C., *Desde Martínez Montañés hasta Pedro Roldán*, Seville, 1932, p. 224; Caturla, M. L., 'Zurbarán exporta a Buenos Aires', *Anales del Instituto de Arte Americano e Investigaciones Estéticas*, 4, 1951, pp. 27–30.
[3] Borobia, op. cit.
[4] Museo Nacional del Prado, catalogue entry for *Saint Elizabeth of Portugal*, inv. no. P001239.

The painting was subsequently examined in Barcelona by Odile Delenda, who praised the elegance of the costume and the successful handling of its broad, weighty folds, cataloguing the canvas as a handsome work by a Sevillian painter within Zurbarán's circle rather than as an autograph work by the master himself.

The composition is independent of the *Saint Agnes* from the Hospital de la Sangre series, today in the Museo de Bellas Artes, Seville, where the saint cradles the lamb and holds her book before her (fig. 3).[5] Here, by contrast, the lamb is placed discreetly at the lower right, while the palm provides a forceful vertical counterpoint to the spreading mantle. The differing solutions exemplify the adaptability of the type throughout Zurbarán's workshop and wider Sevillian following, in which a small number of fixed attributes (palm, lamb, book, inscription) could be freely recombined to generate a large and varied production of virgin martyrs for an equally varied clientele, from Sevillian convents to the churches and monasteries of the Viceroyalty of Peru.

The distinction between Delenda's cataloguing of the present canvas as 'Circle of Zurbarán' and Monreal y Tejada's original attribution to the master himself reflects a broader and long-standing difficulty in the connoisseurship of this type of picture. The sheer scale of Zurbarán's production of standing female saints, driven by the scale of his Sevillian and American commissions, necessarily depended on a workshop of assistants and followers capable of reproducing his formulae with sufficient fidelity that autograph and workshop hands are not always easily separated, a difficulty compounded in the present case by the absence, noted by Monreal himself, of any closely comparable treatment of this particular saint within the accepted corpus. Delenda's assessment, made after direct examination of the canvas, situates the present work within that wider circle of production: a Sevillian hand trained in, and faithful to, Zurbarán's pictorial language.

[5] For the Saint Agnes from the Hospital de la Sangre, part of a larger series of virgin martyrs associated with Zurbarán's workshop, see Rodríguez Codolà, M., *Zurbarán*, Barcelona, 1943.



Fig. 1: Francisco de Zurbarán, *Saint Casilda*, ca. 1635, oil on canvas, 171 x 107 cm (67 ⅜ x 42 ⅛ in.), Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid, inv. no. 448 (1979.26)



Fig. 2: Francisco de Zurbarán, *Saint Elizabeth of Portugal*, ca. 1635, oil on canvas, 184 x 98 cm (72 ½ x 38 ⅝ in.), Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, inv. no. P001239



Fig. 3: Circle of Francisco de Zurbarán, *Saint Agnes*, ca. 1640–50, oil on canvas, 173 x 102 cm (68 ⅛ x 40 ⅛ in.), Museo de Bellas Artes, Seville

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