



Workshop of Juan Pedro López (1724-1787)

Coronation of the Virgin

1751-1787

Caracas, Venezuela

Oil on canvas

DIMENSIONS

Against the gray-pink heavens kneels the Virgin Mary, her hands crossed delicately in front of her chest. At the left of the scene, Christ holds up a crown in one hand and offers her a lily with the other. Somewhat unusually for Coronation scenes, Christ presents the crown alone rather than offering it jointly with God the Father. Visible over his shoulder, along the left edge of the canvas, is the Cross. At right, God the Father, clothed in sumptuous robes, holds out a scepter (which the Virgin grasps gently with the fingers of her right hand) and makes a gesture of benediction. Overhead the Holy Spirit flies in the form of a dove, against a triangle representing the Trinity. Beneath their feet a crowd of putti look on adoringly. This scene, in which the Virgin is crowned Queen of Heaven, is common to Christian art and likely derives from a print source as it follows a very standard iconographic formula. Indeed, the details of Christ offering a lily while God the Father hands the Virgin a scepter is also found in a *Coronation* by Antonio

José Landaeta (fig. 1), who was active in Caracas at the same time as Juan Pedro López.¹ Some of these elements derive from a composition by the Wierix family, which, along with an engraving after Rubens, were the primary sources for this iconographic formula in Latin America.²



Fig. 1 Antonio José Landaeta, *Coronation of the Virgin*, 1765, oil on panel. Collection of Carlos F. Duarte, Caracas.

The Thoma work, with its rococo palette and tenderness evokes both the hand of Juan Pedro López, master painter of eighteenth-century Caracas, and likely various workshop assistants. While López's prolific output must have entailed the aid of numerous assistants, little is known of his workshop practice.³ It also is possible that the piece was not created in López's workshop but is by the hand of a follower and imitator of the rococo master's style.

Certain passages bespeak the intervention of López directly. The crown and scepter in particular bear strong resemblance to other works by López. Equally, the robes of God the

¹ Carlos F. Duarte and Graziano Gasparini, *Arte colonial en Venezuela* (Caracas: Ed. Arte, 1974), 111.

² Héctor Schenone, *Iconografía del Arte Colonial: Santa María* (Buenos Aires: Fundación Tarea, 2008), 249.

³ Carlos F. Duarte, *Juan Pedro López: maestro de pintor, escultor y dorador 1724–1787* (Caracas: Fundación Polar and Galería de Arte Nacional, 1996), 240.

Father share the swirling designs in ochre flecked with white highlights found in other paintings by López including the *Misa de San Régulo* (c. 1767, Colección Gobernación del Distrito Federal, Caracas) and the *Our Lady of Guidance* now at the MFA Boston.

The faces in the Thoma painting are uneven; while God the Father is depicted with a certain sensitivity and delicacy, those of Mary and Christ are more clumsily rendered. The hands, with their long slender fingers, likewise may indicate the intervention of López in the work. The pink, blue, gray-white, and ochre tonalities are also hallmarks of López's work, though the use of pink to depict the heavens is somewhat less common, with López often favoring warmer gold tones to depict celestial space.

While López was fond of repeating certain favored iconographies, such as Our Lady of Light and the Virgin of Mercy, the theme of the Coronation is not one that shows up with regularity in his work. A standalone work in the collection of María de los Ángeles Nuñez and cataloged by Alfredo Boulton is the only other documented example.⁴ However, Coronation scenes appear in two of his painting series. One of López's first known works, the series of the *Life of the Virgin Mary* painted in 1752 for the confraternity of Our Lady of Guidance at the Church of San Mauricio (now housed at the Church of San Francisco) includes a panel showing the Coronation, Assumption, and Dormition of the Virgin (fig. 2). A Coronation scene also appears in the *Third Mysteries of the Holy Rosary – Glorious*, the third panel of a series of the Mysteries of the Rosary created for a rosary confraternity at the Church of San Jacinto in 1781 (fig. 3). Neither of these works mirrors the Thoma painting in its composition, though the pose of Christ follows that of the *Third Mysteries* closely (compare figs. 4 and 5), suggesting a common print source. Like other artists of his era, López frequently followed engravings in his paintings.⁵ In both works, Christ is draped in a pink robe that shows off the muscularity of his form as he offers the Virgin a lily with his right hand and the crown with the other. In the Thoma painting, his head appears slightly enlarged in proportion to his body and he holds the crown awkwardly balanced on the side of his hand. Likewise, the garments of God the Father and the Virgin in the Thoma painting echo those in the *Third Mysteries*.

⁴ See Duarte, *Juan Pedro López*, cat. 175, p. 290. This work does not appear in Boulton's *Historia de la Pintura de Venezuela. Tomo I: Época Colonial*, 2nd ed. (Caracas: Armitano, 1975).

⁵ Duarte, *Juan Pedro López*, page



Fig. 2 Juan Pedro López, *Vida de la Virgen*, panel 7, 1752. Iglesia de San Francisco, Caracas.



Fig 3. Juan Pedro López, *Third Mysteries of the Holy Rosary – Glorious*, 1781, oil on canvas. Collection of Anna Maria Boulton Abalo and Henry Lord Boulton, Caracas.

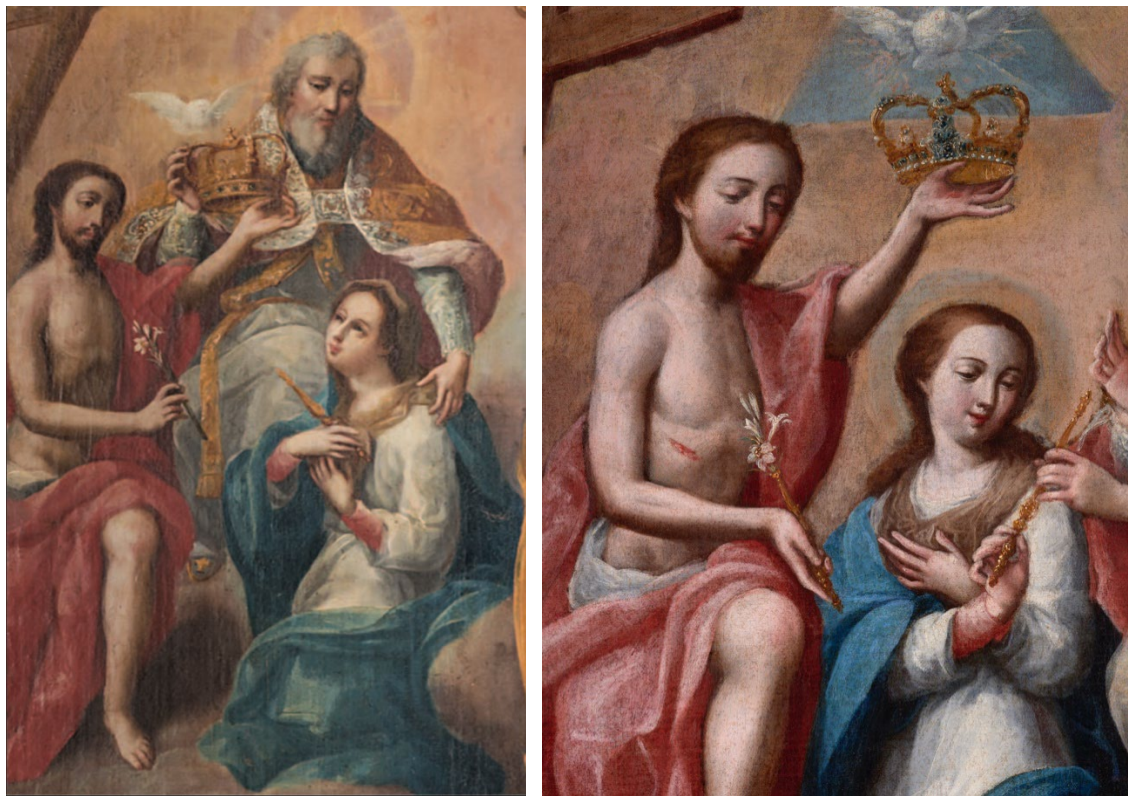


Fig. 4 and 5. Comparison of details from the *Third Mysteries* and the Thoma painting.



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1925 Cedar Springs Rd, Suite 205 | Dallas, TX 75201 | 214.971.7770 | thomafoundation.org