

**Portraits of the Lima Family of the *Condes de la Vega del Ren*
in the
Collection of the Carl & Marilyn Thoma Art Foundation**

On July 4, 1686, the title of *Condes de la Vega del Ren* was given by King Charles II of Spain to Josefa Zorrilla de la Gándara León y Mendoza and her husband Juan José Vázquez de Acuña Menacho, Morga, Sosa y Rengifo (fig. 1). Their older son became the second count de la Vega y del Ren. When he died without issue, the title reverted to his mother who gave it to her younger son, Matías José Vázquez de Acuña (fig. 2), who became the second count and so down the line.¹



Fig. 1. Unidentified Artist, *Portrait of Juan José Vázquez de Acuña, Morga, Menacho y Sosa, First Count de la Vega del Ren*, 1780s. Location unknown.

¹ For the Vega del Ren family, see Francisco Fernández de Béthencourt, “Los Condes de la Vega del Ren,” *Historia genealógica y heráldica de la Monarquía Española Casa Real y grandes de España*, vol. 3 (Madrid: Establecimiento Tipográfica de Enrique Teodoro, 1901), 374-380.

The royal decree refers to Josefa Zorrilla before her husband, emphasizing the role of her father, Juan Zorrilla de la Gándara, in service to the Spanish crown. He became Admiral of the South Sea in 1643 and in 1644 his squadron freed Santiago de Chile from the English. Her husband's worthiness brought mention of his grandfather, Juan Vázquez de Acuña, who left Spain in 1575 for the recovery and population of the Kingdom of Chile, which he achieved with an army at his own cost.²

During the eighteenth century the Spanish monarchy was generous in extending titles of nobility to the creole (American-born of Spanish descent) elite of the Viceroyalty of Peru. In the second half of that century, under the Bourbon kings, there were 300 noble houses or families in Lima.³ In addition to noble titles, the court in Madrid extended appointments such as *oidor decano* to the court of the Audiencia, or membership in the Council of the Indies, neither position incurring any actual work.⁴ Military service to the crown, however, was real, and all the counts descended from Josefa Zorrilla and Juan José Vázquez de Acuña served on both land and sea. Service to the church was another responsibility of the nobility. In the case of the de la Vega y del Ren family, the counts had a hereditary link to a monastery in Burgos and actively supported the Augustinian monastery in Lima, being especially devoted to the revered image of the *Cristo de Burgos* in the chapel that held the family tombs. As well, they supported the Jesuit *Colegio de San Pablo*. Support of religious institutions served both civic and devotional purposes. The motto of the family reminded its members that: "One must keep watch over one's life in order to ensure life after death" (*Velar se debe la vida del tal suerte que viva quede en la*

² Ibid., 376.

³ For background, see Paul Rizo-Patrón Boylan, *Linaje, dote y poder: la nobleza de Lima de 1700 a 1850* (Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, Fondo Editorial, 2001), 99. For a source in English, see Leon G. Cambell, "A Colonial Establishment. Creole Domination of Lima in the Late Eighteenth Century," *Hispanic American Historical Review* no. 1, 52 (1972), 1-25.

⁴ Ibid., 79.

muerte). The motto was on the coat of arms of the Zorilla family in Spain from the time of the Castilian King Sancho III (“El Deseado”) and his son King Alfonso VIII whom Diego de Zorilla had defended their territory from invaders.⁵ The motto was later revived by Saint Teresa of Ávila.

The elite of the Viceroyalty of Peru acquired their wealth principally through landholding and trade. They owned textile mills, sugar plantations and refineries, among other resources. Families gained in power and prestige through marriages and the dowries that came with them. They built grand palaces (*casonas*) in Lima, a number of which are still standing, now restored and put to other uses.⁶ Their family pride is reflected in ancestral portraits, and their wealth is made visible in the gowns and jewelry seen in female portraits.

On October 28, 1746, Lima was almost totally destroyed by an earthquake, and the subsequent tsunami devastated the port of El Callao. In Lima all official buildings and churches were either lost or damaged. Of the original 3,000 houses, only 25 were left standing. Because the tremors lasted three to four minutes, people were able to escape from buildings before they collapsed so only 1,141 inhabitants of Lima lost their lives. The inhabitants of El Callao were less fortunate, with nearly 6,000 lives lost. Art, too, was inevitably lost. Because the mural painting of the Lord of Miracles survived the earthquake intact, it became an object of special veneration in Lima. Family and other portraits created before 1749 must have been part of the lost heritage, which at least some commissions for portraits in the second half of the eighteenth century probably sought to replace.

⁵ Origins of the motto observed by Orlando Hernández Ying.

⁶ The Torre Tagle home now houses the Department of Foreign Affairs of Peru, and the house now called “Casa Goyeneche” belongs to the Banco Nacional de Crédito del Perú. The latter was built in 1771 by Ignacio Caverio y Vázquez de Acuña and his wife Micaela de Tagle. It later became the residence of the seventh count de la Vega del Ren and his descendants until the mid-nineteenth century.

It was customary for Spanish colonial portraits to have inscribed cartouches and additions to the inscriptions added at a later date. These inscriptions update the sitters' accomplishments and often note the date of the sitters' deaths. Five of the paintings of the de la Vega del Ren family in the Thoma collection, and the one (fig. 1) in an unknown collection today, all bear the dates of the sitters' deaths; 1691, 1737, 1744, 1774 and 1792. However, four these portraits, which must be at least partly fictitious, were all painted at the same time by the same hand. They are attributed by Ricardo Kusunoki and Luis Eduardo Wuffarden to the painter Pedro José Díaz.

These portraits were clearly meant to hang together in a principal room in a grand *casona*. It is possible that they were commissioned to replace portraits that had been lost or damaged by the 1746 earthquake. The male sitters are all pictured before the same red baldachin intended to emphasize their noble status, the family crests are all exactly the same, and the cartouches are also alike. The “earliest” male portrait (fig. 1) depicts a seventeenth-century gentleman with shoulder-length dark hair, wearing the black garments of the Habsburg reign that ended in 1700. It is likely that the portrait of the first count is entirely fictitious, as was common with portraits of viceroys and other luminaries of the early years of the viceroyalty. These did not pretend to depict the actual appearance of the sitters, but rather to serve as “documentary testimonials.”⁷ The second and third counts are pictured wearing wigs and the ostentatious dress of the Bourbon era (figs. 2 and 3). There is a precedent for the Thoma series of “ancestral portraits” in works representing the marquises of Santiago by Cristóbal de Aguilar, all three painted and dated 1769. The first marquis was named by King Philip IV in 1660, so Aguilar

⁷ Ricardo Estabridis, “El retrato del siglo XVIII e Lima como símbolo del poder,” in *El barroco peruano* (Lima: Banco de Crédito, 2002), 139 [135-171].

painted him in the somber dress of the Habsburg era. However, he painted the second and third marquises in elaborate Bourbon dress.⁸

The faces of the third and fourth counts de la Vega del Ren and that of the wife of the fourth count (figs. 2, 3, and 4) appear to be quite individualized, perhaps being based on earlier portraits, painted while they lived. Those were probably smaller, bust-length paintings that recorded their likeness.



Fig. 2

2018.003

Unidentified Artist

Matías José Vázquez de Acuña Menacho y Zorrilla de la Gándara León y Menacho, Second Count de la Vega del Ren [1675-1737]

Peru, Lima

1780s

Oil on canvas, 79 ½ x 49 3/16 inches

⁸ Ibid, 152-153 for text and images.

According to the inscription on the cartouche at lower left, the second count, who was born in Lima, was *Alférez de Mar y Guerra* (“of land and sea”) at the garrison of El Callao that protected the port and city of Lima. The *alférez* was the highly ranked officer entrusted with the royal standard on board a ship.⁹ Matías José Vázquez de Acuña served as captain in the Royal Armada of the South Sea (the Pacific Ocean) and captain of the cavalry in Chile. He also served as governor of the port of Valparaíso (Chile), and magistrate and judge at Castrovirreyna in the region of Huancavelica (Peru). The inscription then details his religious affiliations beginning with his position as an “elector” of the monastery of San Andrés de Tabliega in the Municipality of Montijo in the archbishopric of Burgos, the region of Spain where his family had roots. In Lima, the second count de la Vega del Ren was a patron of the Augustinian convent of Our Lady of Grace and particularly of the Chapel of the *Cristo de Burgos* in that church. He was also a patron of the Jesuit College of San Pablo.¹⁰ He is pictured wearing a three-piece suit (jacket/*casaca*, waistcoat/*chaleco*, and breeches/*calzones*) of red and deep blue textiles.¹¹

⁹ I am grateful to Francisco Yábar for his assistance in translating the military titles as accurately as possible.

¹⁰ According to Ricardo Palma (“Cosas tiene el rey cristiano que parecen de pagano,” in *Tradiciones peruanas, sexta serie* (Biblioteca Virtual Universal, 2003) es.sikisource.org/wiki/Cosas_tiene_el_rey_que parecen_de_pagano) the association with the College of San Pedro came about through family affiliations. María Rengifo inherited the patronage of the college from her father, who had donated to the Jesuits much of the land on which the church and school were built. When María Rengifo’s nephew married the future first countess de la Vega del Ren, the patronage of the college, with its responsibilities and perquisites, was added to the prerogatives of the *Condado de la Vega del Ren*. This information is probably accurate despite the witty tone of Palma’s essays.

¹¹ The Thoma Art Foundation is grateful for the observations on costume provided by James Middleton: “His elaborately curled, powdered wig, shorter than the wigs of 1690-1720, also suggests a 1730s date. In general, this and the other portraits in this group demonstrate the Lima portrait school’s obsession with minutely rendered textiles. All of the men’s suits in this group are made of red and deep blue textiles, a combination that appears in a large number of Lima men’s portraits. Scarlet and deep blue were the colors of the elite *Dragones de Lima*, and it seems possible that a gala version of the regiment’s uniform may have been a de facto Lima court costume. It is interesting that while jacket styles vary considerably, the silver-braided waistcoats seen in a number of Lima portraits is very similar. The third count wears a three-piece suit (jacket/*casaca*, waistcoat/*chaleco*, and breeches/*calzones*) consistent with conservative men’s dress between the 1720s and 1740s. The (silk damask or cut velvet) jacket’s exaggerated cuffs are of a style that peaked in the early 1730s. His breeches are apparently of the same fabric as his jacket. His deep blue (silk damask) waistcoat, lavishly trimmed with silver braid, may be an emblem of his service in the elite *Dragones de Lima*. It is possible to see the long sleeves of the waistcoat at the cuffs of the jacket, a somewhat old-fashioned element. His carefully painted fine linen shirt shows its closures and the inserted (Flemish linen) lace of the bosom. He carries a plain, black tricorne hat, wears plain brown (woolen?) stockings and sturdy shoes.”



Fig. 3

2018.004

Unidentified Artist

Peru, Lima

José Jerónimo Cayetano Vázquez de Acuña Menacho. Sosa Zorrilla de la Gándara, León, y Mendoza, Yturgoyen Amasa y Pastene Lizperguer, Andia, Yrarrasabal, Third Count of de la Vega del Ren. [Valparaíso, 1704-Lima, 1744]

1780s

Oil on canvas, 79 9/16 x 49 5/16 inches

The third count de la Vega del Ren was born in Valparaíso when his father, the second count, served there as governor. José Jerónimo served as general commissary of the royal cavalry and as lord chief justice of Chayanta, now a province in the north of the Department of Potosí in

Bolivia. The inscription on the cartouche at lower right goes on to document his affiliation with religious institutions, which are exactly those of his father: Elector of the monastery of San Andrés de Tabliega in the municipality of Montija in the Archbishopric of Burgos, patron of the Augustinian monastery of Our Lady of Grace in Lima, and of the chapel of the *Cristo de Burgos* in the church of that monastery, and patron of the Jesuit college of San Pablo. He died in Chayanta on August 6, 1744, at the age of forty.¹²

¹² “At first glance, the fourth count’s clothes seem identical to those of his father. Indeed, in general style they are the same, but strong differences emerge on examination. His 1730s cuffs are more exaggerated than his father’s, incorporating silver braid matching that of his waistcoat, which has apparently lost its old-fashioned inner sleeves but is otherwise practically identical to his father’s. His waistcoat (in a gesture of informality?) shows a bit of its lining. His breeches are also silver-braided. His feathered and braid-trimmed hat and embroidered stockings are more luxurious than his father’s, but their shoes about the same. His wig, identical in shape to his father’s, is less ornately curled.” James Middleton



Fig. 4

2018.005

Unidentified Artist

Peru, Lima

Francisca Bárbara Vázquez de Acuña, Menaco Sosa, Zorrilla de la Gándara, León y Mendoza, Román de Aulestia, y Cedreros, Gómez\ Boquete y Montealegre, Third Countess de la Vega del Ren [1706-1774]

1780s

Oil on canvas, 79 5/8 x 53 5/16 inches

According to the inscription, the sitter, born in Lima, was the wife of José Jerónimo de Acuña y Menacho, the third count de la Vega del Ren (1704-1738). They were married in 1730.

Francisca Bárbara died on April 20, 1774, thirty years after her husband. Women of high birth

brought with them into marriage powerful family connections as well as the considerable dowries detailed in documents. Francisca Bárbara's magnificent gown of rich damask and her jewelry testify to her own family wealth. However, she is pictured with the heraldry of her husband's family. She wears a gown with a full skirt and a bodice with a peplum. The jewelry she wears almost certainly actually belonged to her family patrimony.¹³

¹³ "The fourth countess wears a gown composed of a full skirt and a *casquin* bodice, its (silk & metallic) brocade rendered in the precise technique that is so characteristic of the Lima portrait school. The *casquin*—distinguished by its peplum—was the favored garment of Hispanic women in the first half of the eighteenth century. Its open front reveals a contrasting stomacher adorned with a massive brooch, which she wears in addition to her ornate necklace, earrings, and the profusion of bracelets on both forearms (a typically Limeño practice. She gestures toward further jewels on the table. Her jewels are almost certainly "real"—i.e. these are probably actual still-life portraits of extant objects belonging to her family's patrimony. What differentiates her from a European lady is her Lima hair style with its elaborate asymmetrical bow, and her flat shoes with their apparently slashed toes." James Middleton



Fig. 5

2018.006

Pedro José Díaz (active 1770-1810)

Portrait of Matías Mariano José Cayetano Vázquez de Acuña, Menacho Zorrilla de la Gándara Yturgey en Aniasa, y Lisperguér, Roman de Aulestia, y Gomes Boquete, Fifth Count of de la Vega del Ren [1738-1792]

Peru, Lima

1780s

Oil on canvas, 82 1/16 x 51 5/8 inches

According to the inscription along the bottom of the canvas, the fifth count de la Vega del Ren was born in Lima where he was educated at the prestigious Jesuit *Colegio Real de San Martín*. Following in his ancestors' footsteps, he was a military man, serving as lieutenant colonel of the Spanish infantry of Lima and as a magistrate of the city. He also maintained family tradition by serving as an elector of the monastery of San Andrés de Tabliega in the municipality of Montija in the peninsular Archbishopric of Burgos. In Lima, he was a patron of the Augustinian church of Our Lady of Grace and the chapel dedicated to the *Cristo de Burgos* as well as of the Chapel of All Saints in the Cathedral of Lima and the College of San Pablo. In the last words of the inscription, added posthumously, have been abraded, but we know that Matías Mariano Vázquez de Acuña died in November 1792. He was succeeded by his son, José Matías Vázquez de Acuña (1784-1842) the sixth count and the last American to hold the title.¹⁴

¹⁴ "The fifth count wears a three-piece suit (of fine wool or silk) consistent with the picture's date, though rather conservative. The length of the waistcoat and the severely cut-away of the jacket front (of which it is only possible to close a single button) indicate a later eighteenth-century date, as does his short wig. The stout shoes worn by the third and fourth counts have been replaced here with a slipper. Like his forebears he carries rather than wears his hat. His only ornaments are his paired watch fobs, a ring and his *bastón de mando*. It also seems that the Lima Dragoons reversed their colors sometime after about 1770, as one begins to see numerous men's portraits with deep blue jackets and red waistcoats, rather than the red-on-blue combination of the earlier years of the century." James Middleton



Fig. 6

2005.011

Pedro José Díaz (active 1770-1810)

Portrait of Doña María Rosa de Rivera y Mendoza, Countess de la Vega del Ren

Peru, Lima

Signed and dated 178[?]

Oil on canvas, 78 3/4 x 52 3/8 inches

María Rosa de Rivera y Mendoza was born in Lima in January 1746. Her parents were also creoles, born in Peru, and so were her grandparents, with the exception of her maternal grandfather, who came from Madrid. In 1772 she married Matías Vázquez de Acuña y Menacho, fifth count de la Vega del Ren. In the Díaz portrait María Rosa is pictured with her own family crest shown at upper left, an escutcheon with emblems of the Ribera and Mendoza families.¹⁵

Pedro José Díaz was one of the most talented portraitists of late eighteenth-century Lima. His work as a portraitist was held in such high regard that he painted state portraits of not one, but four of the viceroys of Peru. His portrait of Viceroy Manuel de Amat y Junyent, who served between 1761 and 1776, would slightly predate the Thoma portrait of María Rosa de Rivera, which is dated to sometime in the decade of the 1780s. Díaz also painted three later viceroys, one after another: Ambrosio O'Higgins, Marqués de Osorno (1798, Museo Nacional de Arqueología, Antropología e Historia del Perú, Lima); Gabriel de Avilés, the third Marqués de Avilés (1804, Lima, Museo Nacional de Arqueología, Antropología e Historia del Perú); and Fernando de Abascal, Marqués de la Concordia (Museo de Arte de la Universidad de San Marcos, Lima).

It is possible that the portraits of the ancestors of the sixth Count de la Vega del Ren in the Thoma collection were assigned by Don Matías Mariano and Doña María Rosa to one of the several unidentified Limeño artists who worked as portrait painters during this period. On the

¹⁵ “The countess wears the Lima version of the contemporary open robe or round gown, its (silk and metallic) brocade rendered in very sharp focus. Unlike the *casaquín* with its separate bodice and skirt worn by Francisca Bárbara, the open robe was a shoulders-to-ankles garment worn open over a petticoat, with the upper front of the upper front filled by a stomacher. Like the fourth countess, she wears her hair in local rather than cosmopolitan style, unlike the fourth countess, she wears European-style shoes.” James Middleton

other hand, it is possible that Pedro Díaz painted these as well as the living couple, though the artist may have relied on an assistant in the creation of the portraits of the deceased members of the family.

When it came to their own portraits, Don Matías Mariano and Doña María Rosa selected one of the most prestigious artists of the time and who signed the canvases. The somewhat archaic elements in the four ancestor portraits are replaced in the Díaz portraits with an up-to-date Neoclassical setting of severe columns and, in the case of the count himself, a simpler, more elegant military costume. The grand interior in which the count is pictured is softened in the portrait of his wife with a mirrored dressing table bearing accoutrements of her femininity.

The son of Matías Mariano and María Rosa, José Matías Pascual Vázquez de Acuña Menacho y Ribera, sixth count de la Vega del Ren (1784-1842) was to become one of the signatories of the oath of independence of Peru.

Postscript

The above text was written soon after four of the family portraits were acquired by the Thoma Foundation in 2017. Since that time, exhibitions that have included one or more of the portraits of the Vega del Ren family have encouraged additional study, but have as well invited some confusion.

The desire to attribute unsigned paintings from the Viceroyalty of Peru has resulted in many wrong attributions over the years. That desire was reflected in a message to the Thoma Foundation from a curator at the Museo del Prado requesting that the portrait of the 3rd Count of Vega del Ren be attributed to the Lima painter Cristóbal Lozano in the catalogue of the exhibition “Return Journey.” That attribution was rejected by art historians in Lima and the catalogue published the work instead as “attributed to Pedro José Díaz.” The attribution has stuck.¹⁶

More recently, in the catalogue of the Blanton Museum of Art exhibition “Painted Cloth,” Ricardo Kusunoki has assigned all five of the Vega del Ren portraits in the Thoma collection to Pedro Díaz, dating all of them c. 1776.¹⁷ Kusunoki suggests that the portraits were all painted at the same time, which is possible. However, the portrait of the family matriarch María Rosa de Rivera is signed and dated 178?, with the last digit illegible. If the works were all created at the same time, it would have been in the decade of the 1780s, though Díaz was not in Lima in 1788.¹⁸

¹⁶ See Rafael López-Guzmán, ed., *Return Journey: Art of the Americas in Spain* (Madrid: Museo Nacional del Prado, 2021), pp. 168-169. Both the portraits of the 3rd Count and his wife Francisca Bárbara, are attributed to Díaz and dated c. 1770-1780.

¹⁷ Ricardo Kusunoki Rodríguez, “Opulence Unknown in Europe: Games of Appearance in Lima, Portraiture, 1740-1800,” in *Painted Cloth: Fashion and Ritual in Colonial Latin America*, ed. Rosario L. Granados (Blanton Museum of Art, 1022), pp. 67-99.

¹⁸ Anthony Holguín Valdez, “Un retrato de Santa Rosa de Lima firmado por el pintor Pedro Díaz,” *ILLAPA Mana Tukukuq*. (Revista del Instituto de Investigaciones Museológicas y Artísticas de la Universidad Ricardo Palma) 2019, 16, pp. 46-55, at p. 47.

This writer finds the attribution of all the paintings to José Diaz problematical. It responds to, as noted above, a desire to attribute unsigned works of art, but lacks the application of connoisseurship or technical study. Some years ago, Ricardo Estabridis published an essay on portraiture in eighteenth-century Lima in which he distinguished between the ones signed by an artist, attributed to an artist, and a slew of perfectly workmanlike portraits assigned to the “escuela Limeña.”¹⁹ It still seems to this writer that José Diaz was commissioned to paint the living husband and wife and that the ancestor portraits were assigned to another portraitist of the “Lima school.”

José Diaz maintained his relationship with the Vega del Ren family. In 1810, the 7th Count of Vega del Ren, who was mayor of Lima, commissioned Diaz to paint a full length “portrait” of Saint Rose of Lima and a pendant representation of Saint Francis Solano.²⁰ These, now in the Museo Nacional de Arqueología, Antropología e Historia del Perú in Lima, were originally in the Chapter Room of the Cathedral of Lima.

Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt

¹⁹ Ricardo Estabridis, “El retrato del siglo XVIII en Lima como símbolo de poder,” in: *El Barocco Peruano* (Lima: Banco de Crédito, 2003), pp. 125-171.

²⁰ *Holguín Valdez*, p. 48.