

Paintings in the Thoma Collection from the Workshop of Bernardo Rodríguez



Workshop of Bernardo Rodríguez
Jesus, Mary and Joseph with Mercedarian Symbols
Ecuador, Quito
Late 18th-early 19th century, 43 ½ x 33 inches
Collection of the Carl & Marilyn Thoma Collection, acc. no. 1999.017

The art of painting in Quito, Ecuador languished during the first half of the eighteenth century after a vigorous and productive seventeenth century. The religious confraternities continued to commission works of art, but with a preference for sculpture. After 1750, however, the status of painting rose, so much so that in a discourse of 1805 the artists José Cortés de Alcocer, Manuel Samaniego y Jaramillo, and his brother Bernardo Rodríguez de la Parra y Jaramillo were praised as representatives in America of Raphael Mengs, Charles LeBrun, and Titian.¹

The first documented work by Bernardo Rodríguez (active ca. 1768-1803), representing Saint Eloi, the patron saint of silversmiths (Museo del Banco Central, Quito), is dated 1775. However, he must have been well established long before that date, for in 1768 he was renting a storefront in the large home of the sculptor Bernardo Legarda near the Franciscan convent.² From 1780 Rodríguez worked for the Mercedarians, creating paintings for the cloister of their convent in Quito. He also worked for the Franciscans, for whom he painted a series of the miracles of Saint Anthony of Padua and a *Virgin of the Immaculate Conception* (today in the Museo Fray Pedro Bedón of the Franciscan convent). In 1797 the Augustinians commissioned portraits of the Four Doctors of the Church (today in the museum of the Augustinian convent). Bernardo and Manuel Samaniego also collaborated on the wall paintings that decorate the “cell”

¹ “... estoy seguro que Cortés, los Samaniego, Rodríguez, habían representado en el Nuevo Continente a Mengs, Lebront [sic] y el Ticiano.” Quoted from José María Vargas, ed., *Arte de Ecuador: siglos XVIII-XIX* (Quito, 1977), 53. For a thoughtful (and more measured) introduction to colonial painting in Quito, see Carmen Fernández-Salvador, “Introduction. Reflections on Painting in Colonial Quito: The Artists, Subjects, and Styles,” in *The Art of Painting in Colonial Quito/El arte de la pintura en Quito Colonial*, ed. Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt (Philadelphia: Saint Joseph’s University Press, 2012), 2-17.

² Alexandra Kennedy Troya, “Transformación del papel de talleres artesanales quiteños en el siglo XVIII: El caso de Bernardo Legarda,” *Anales del Museo de América*, 2 (1994), p. 63.

of the provincial father of the convent of La Merced in Quito in 1797.³ Together they decorated the vault of the cathedral and the walls of the side aisles in egg tempera.

Rodríguez had a large workshop, evinced by the many paintings such as this one that incorporate characteristic figural motifs and a clear palette of primary colors tending toward the pastel hues of the Rococo. Rodríguez's figures are rendered with porcelain-like delicacy, and his compositions are infused with a mood of gentle piety. In the Thoma painting the "two Trinities," both heavenly (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) and earthly (Virgin Mary, Christ Child, Saint Joseph) are accompanied by little angels looking on approvingly. The Virgin wears the scapular of the Mercedarian order and the Child holds the yoke that symbolizes the original dedication of the order to the ransoming of Christian captives in medieval Spain. Rodríguez's productivity was spurred by a workshop skilled at replicating the master's popular compositions, adapting them in each instance to the commission.

This painting is enhanced by the ornate frame, a fine example of Ecuadorian Rococo carving and gilding. The sculptor Legarda's workshop created not only sculpture, but mirrors, musical instruments, marquetry, prints and other things.⁴ It is not impossible that his workshop also provided the beautiful frames that enhance Rodríguez's paintings. A wide variety of luxury goods were produced in late-eighteenth century Quito, including the elaborate frames favored by patrons and collectors.

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³ Alexandra Kennedy, "Algunas consideraciones sobre el arte barroco en Quito y la 'interrupción' ilustrada (siglos XVII y XVIII), in: Alexandra Kennedy, ed., *Arte de la Real Audiencia de Quito, siglos XVII-XIX* (Madrid, 2002), p. 61.

⁴ Ibid., 64.



Workshop of Bernardo Rodríguez

The Presentation of Christ in the Temple

Ecuador, Quito

Late 18th century

Oil on canvas, 44 x 32 inches

Collection of the Carl and Marilyn Thoma Foundation, acc. no. 1998.2

The composition relies on a German print (fig. 1) that represents *The Presentation in the Temple* after a painting by Johann Georg Bergmüller. It was Saint Simeon who performed the circumcision of the Christ Child, as narrated by Saint Luke 2:25-35. Although the proper subject of the painting is made clear by the presence of Simeon at the left of the composition, it is possible that the patron who commissioned this painting was attracted by the number of members of the family of Jesus Christ who are included.

While the subject of the earthly trinity portrays Jesus' nuclear family, images of the Holy Kinship depict His extended family. After the Council of Trent, such images focused on five figures: Jesus, Mary, Joseph, Anne, and Joachim. In the Hispanic world, these family portraits of Jesus with His parents and maternal grandparents were titled *Los Cinco Señores* (The Five Lords) or *La Santa Parentela* (The Holy Kinship).⁵ The subject was also called *Los Antepasados de Cristo* (The Ancestors of Christ). This would not be the only example of print source somewhat repurposed to a different subject.

The Presentation in the Temple is a fine example of the paintings created in Bernardo Rodríguez's productive workshop. The elaborate fictive frame that encloses the figural composition, "carved and gilded" in Rococo style, its curves interlaced with delicately rendered flowers, is also characteristic of Rodríguez's work. These decorative motifs were spread by prints from Augsburg that carried the German Rococo throughout the Americas. Engravings by the Klaubers may still be found in Quito collections, such as that of the Museo Fray Pedro Bedón at the Franciscan convent, and engraved repertories of ornament were also created by Frans Xavier Havermann, Carl Pier, Emmanuel Eichel and others during the second half of the century.⁶ These print sources had broad application throughout the Americas, reflected in the architecture of Brazil,⁷ as well as the decorative arts of Quito.

⁵ Joseph F. Chorprenning, O.S.F.S., "The Earthly Trinity, Holy Kinship, and Nascent Church: An Introduction to the Iconography of the Holy Family," in: *The Holy Family as Prototype of the Civilization of Love: Images from the Viceroyal Americas*, exh. cat., Saint Joseph's University, Philadelphia, PA, 1996, 47.

⁶ And these were used by printmaker elsewhere in Europe, as well. See examples of rococo framing elements used in eighteenth-century Spanish prints in: Javier Portús and Jesusa Vega, *La estampa religiosa en la España del antiguo régimen* (Madrid, 1998).

⁷ See Myriam Andrade Ribeiro de Oliveira, *O Rococó Religiosos no Brasil e seus antecedentes europeus* (São Paulo, 2003), 91-97.



Fig. 1. Mezzotint thesis page after Johann Andreas Pfeffel (1674-1748), after Johann George Bergmuller, *The Presentation in the Temple*, (Prague, National Library of the Czech Republic). Image courtesy PESSCA.



Workshop of Bernardo Rodríguez

The Holy Kinship (Santa Parentela)

Late 18th-early 19th century

Oil on panel, 11 x 7 ³/₄ inches

Collection of the Carl & Marilyn Thoma Foundation, acc. no. 2015.12

The artist who created this composition changed the subject by the elimination of Saint Simeon. The figures are removed from the narrative recorded by Luke 2:25-35 so that the composition, originally based on a German print (see 1998.2), now focuses on the earthly family of Jesus. The artist, perhaps at the request of the patron, has added at upper right a pair of angels bearing the initials of Jesus and Mary. Mary is the star of the composition. Golden rays lead to her from God the Father, and she is crowned by a delicate gold crown. The palette and figure types proceed from the models found in works by the hand of Bernardo Rodríguez.

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