

**JAIME EGUIGUREN**

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*Torcuato Ruiz del Peral*

Exfiliana, Granada, 1708 – Granada, 1773

**Saint Michael Defeating the Demon**

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*Torcuato Ruiz del Peral*

Exfiliana, Granada, 1708 – Granada, 1773

**Saint Michael Defeating the Demon**

between 1740–1770

Carved and polychromed wood with applied lace and  
silver accessories

94.7 × 42 cm

Private collection, Madrid

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*Adrián Contreras-Guerrero*

Art historian

Torcuato Ruiz del Peral was born in 1708 in Exfiliana, a small town in the Guadix region, the son of Nicolás Ruiz and Gregoria Peral. He would become the most important sculptor of his time in Granada. He trained in the workshop of Diego de Mora and established himself independently from 1730 onward. His biography contains almost novelistic episodes: despite family opposition, he secretly married Beatriz Trencó por palabras (by exchange of vows) in 1747. After twenty-five years in this situation, and having had at least ten children together—some even before the secret marriage—the couple legalized their union in 1772. This irregularity appears to have resulted from the sculptor's family's opposition to the match, since Beatriz was described as “destitute” and had a relative condemned by the Inquisition. As a consequence, their first children, who could not be officially recognized, were placed in various foundling homes.<sup>1</sup> To compound these misfortunes, the newly achieved normality following legalization lasted only briefly: the master's health, weakened by inhaling dust derived from his work—especially during the laborious carving of the choir stalls of Guadix Cathedral—led to his death only a year later, in 1773.

This work may undoubtedly be attributed to the Granadan master, who likely executed it between the 1740s and 1770s, during his most productive period. In these years he received numerous commissions in his workshop, which obliged him to rely on assistants, and the quality of his production consequently fluctuates. Several representations of this iconography are attributed to him, the most secure being the one in the Church of Saints Justus and Pastor in Granada, commissioned during the rectorate of the Jesuit Father Martín García, that is, between 1739 and 1741<sup>2</sup> (Fig. 1). Nevertheless, this Saint Michael appears to be the finest in quality among them.

The work is practically intact and even preserves the metallic bobbin lace applied to the edges of the tunic and the caligae or boots, as was customary at the time. It also retains its silver attributes: the silver chain with which the archangel binds the demon, the rays (the central one straight and the lateral ones undulating), and the helmet formed of asymmetrical rocaïlle motifs of unmistakable Rococo lineage.

The pedestal upon which the ensemble stands is characteristic of Granadan Baroque and is documented in earlier works such as the sculptures of Saint John of God and Saint Raphael in the Basilica of San Juan de Dios (Fig. 2). It is distinguished by slightly projecting central sections on each side and by carved foliage



FIG. 1 San Miguel, Torcuato Ruiz del Peral, 1739-1740. Iglesia de los Santos Justo y Pastor, Granada

1 On the artist's biography: Antonio Gallego Burín, “Un escultor del siglo XVIII. Torcuato Ruiz del Peral.” *Cuadernos de Arte de la Universidad de Granada* 1 (1936): 185–327; Ana María Gómez Román, “Los lances de un hombre y la fortuna de un artista: nuevas noticias sobre Ruiz del Peral.” *Boletín del Centro de Estudios Pedro Suárez* 21 (2008): 213–274.

2 Joaquín de Béthencourt, *Historia del Colegio de San Pablo* (Granada: Facultad de Teología, 1991).

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appliqués in the central zones.

The angel's face is highly refined in configuration, extremely similar to other works by the sculptor, especially female figures such as the Virgin in the Annunciation group now in the chapel of the Escuelas del Ave María in Granada, or the Virgin of Grace in the church of Valderrubio (Figs. 3a and 3b).

In contrast to the angel's freshness, the subdued demon is rendered with a rather unhealthy greenish tone, demonstrating his evil nature. This reflects the ancient artistic principle of *kalokagathia*, whereby the beautiful (*kalós*) is the outward manifestation of the good (*agathós*); conversely, evil manifests externally in an ugly appearance. A magnificent detail is the demon's gesture of pain: with one hand he pulls his hair, while with the other he grips his tail, in this case with the tips of his red claws (Figs. 4a and 4b).

The angel's wide and striking skirt is noteworthy, appearing to contain a farthingale, which—together with its rich polychromy—speaks to the full Baroque moment in which it was created. This taste for reproducing contemporary fashion, even at the risk of deliberate anachronism, is also present in other works by the artist, such as the Saints Justus and Pastor of the parish church of the same name in Granada<sup>3</sup> (Fig. 5).



FIG. 2 San Juan de Dios, attributed to Bernardo de Mora, entre 1664-1679, detail. Basílica de San Juan de Dios, Granada.



FIG. 3 Virgen de Gracia, Torcuato Ruiz del Peral, detail. Iglesia de Nuestra Señora de la Purificación, Valderrubio, Granada, Spain



Fig. 3b Torcuato Ruiz del Peral, detail. Jaime Eguiguren collection.

3 Manuel García Luque, "Saint Justus" and "Saint Pastor." In Manuel García Luque (ed.), Torcuato Ruiz del Peral. The Autumn of the Baroque (Granada: Consejería de Cultura y Deporte de la Junta de Andalucía, 2024), 198–203.

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Fig. 4a Torcuato Ruiz del Peral, detail. Jaime Eguiguren Collection

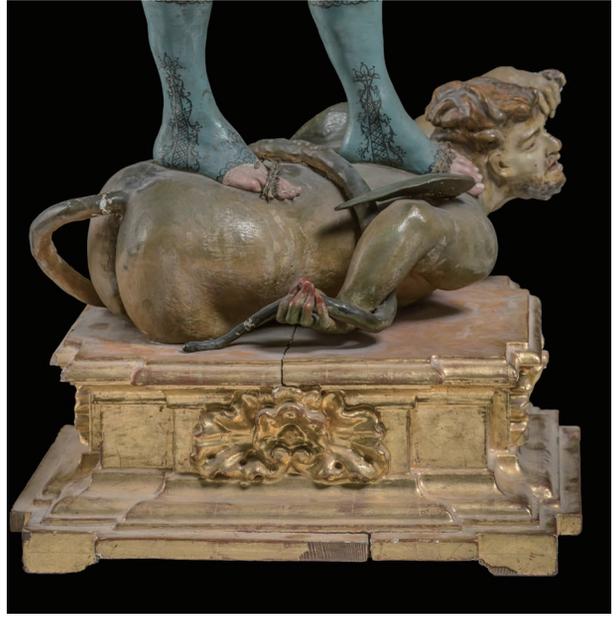


Fig. 4b Torcuato Ruiz del Peral, detail. Jaime Eguiguren Collection



Fig. 5 San Justo, Torcuato Ruiz del Peral, 1750. Iglesia de los Santos Justo y Pastor, Granada, Spain

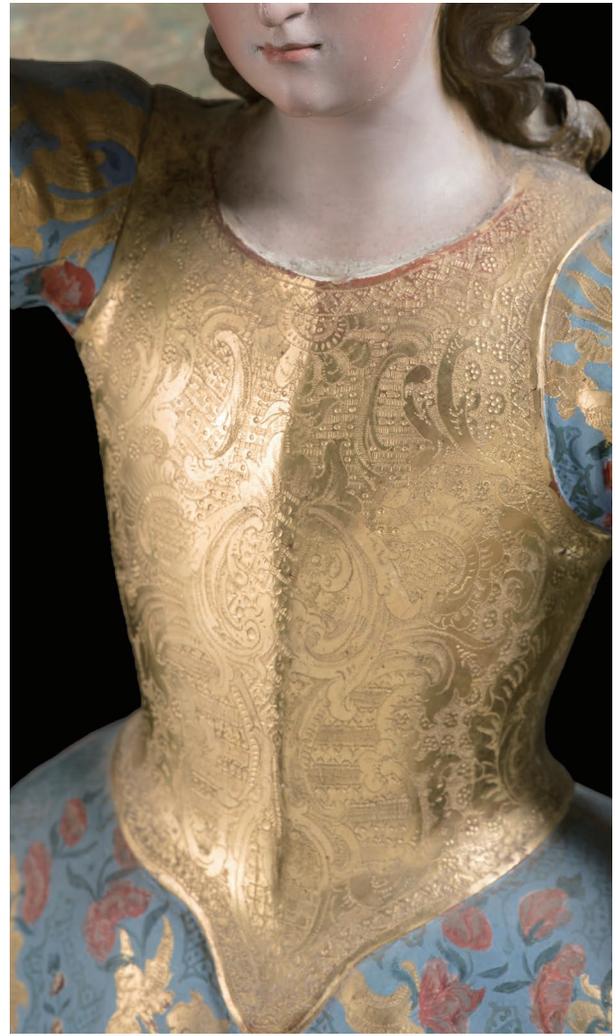


Fig. 6 Torcuato Ruiz del Peral, detail. Jaime Eguiguren Collection

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The polychromy is, in fact, one of the most outstanding features of the image. With its profusion of flowers and gilded rocaïlle motifs, it closely resembles other works by Peral, particularly the Saint Joseph with the Child in the Convent of Corpus Christi in Granada, which likewise employs a blue ground. These polychrome decorations were highly appreciated in their time, as evidenced by the fact that in 1752 the artist was chosen to repaint the polychromy of the kneeling portraits of the Catholic Monarchs in the Royal Chapel of Granada.<sup>4</sup>

The cuirass displays magnificent picado de lustre work—that is, incised indentations carved into the previously gilded surface (Fig. 6). The aim was to create a faceted surface that would enhance the brilliance of the gold, especially under the dynamic candlelight that produced flashes and gleams. Furthermore<sup>5</sup>, Peral favored brush-point decorative details on certain textile garments, as seen here on the boots, comparable to what appears on the stockings of Saint Pastor in Granada.

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4 Adrián Contreras-Guerrero, “The Catholic Monarchs.” In *Lux. Las Edades del Hombre*. 25th Edition, edited by José María Martínez Frías and Jesús María Parrado del Olmo (Fundación Las Edades del Hombre, 2021), 282–285.

5 María Dolores Blanca López and Lourdes Blanca López, “The Technique of Torcuato Ruiz del Peral.” In Manuel García Luque (ed.), *Torcuato Ruiz del Peral. The Autumn of the Baroque* (Granada: Consejería de Cultura y Deporte de la Junta de Andalucía, 2024), 106.











