



Luis de Morales El Divino
(Badajoz, c. 1510/11 - Alcántara, c. 1586)
Virgin of the Hat or Virgin in Gipsy Dress with the
Christ Child
ca. 1567
Oil on panel, 57 x 41 cm

Provenance

Former collection of the Count of Adanero (second half
of the 19th century)

Fondo Cultural Villar Mir.

Exhibitions

Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado 2015–16, El

Divino Morales, cat. no. 18;

Bilbao, Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao 2016, El

Divino Morales, cat. no. 18;

Barcelona, Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya (MNAC) 2016, El Divino Morales, cat. no.
18.

Literature

Angulo Íñiguez 1955, p. 239, fig. 243;

Gaya Nuño 1961, pp. 19 and 41, no. 3;

Bäcksbacka 1962, p. 179, no. 76, fig. 123;

Camón Aznar 1970, p. 470;

Pérez Sánchez 1977, p. 314;

Rodríguez G. de Ceballos 1987, p. 202;

Marías 1989, p. 342;

Solís Rodríguez 1999, pp. 216–17, no. 30;

F. J. Pizarro in Pizarro 2006, pp. 267–68;

Mateo 2007, p. 16;

Aliaga 2007, pp. 45–62;

Ruiz Gómez 2015, pp. 214–217, cat. no. 17;

Falomir et al. 2019, pp. 132–145;

Carretero 2021, pp. 87–94;

One of Morales's most innovative creations is the Virgin of the Hat, so called because the Virgin is wearing a picturesque wide-brimmed hat adorned with interlaced ribbons. The painting is also known as the "Virgin in Gipsy Dress", the name by which it appears in a document of 26 September 1567 ratifying the commitment to paint "two panels" with that subject for the Bishop of Badajoz and future saint, Juan de Ribera (1532–1611). This iconographic stipulation may well have been the idea of his great patron Ribera, who, well

versed as he was in the Tridentine accords, considered that the most truthful and decorous way to represent the Virgin during the exile and flight into Egypt of the Holy Family was to dress her as a “Gipsy”, since that race was believed to have originated in Egypt. Scholars have generally followed Pérez Sánchez in proposing the source of inspiration for these exotic garments as the print of “L’Égyptienne” from François Desprez’s *Recueil de la diversité des habits, qui sont de présent en usage, tant es pays d’Europe, Asie, Afrique & Isles sauvages* of 1562, which showed the woman wearing exactly the same type of hat and holding a child in her mantle in a very similar fashion. However, figures identical to the “Egyptian woman” appear in various Flemish paintings from the end of the fifteenth century, such as the *Hay Wain* by Bosch (c. 1450/60–1516) or the *Multiplication of the Loaves and Fishes* by Cornelys Massys (c. 1510–c. 1557), both at the monastery of El Escorial. Even in Spain, Juan Correa de Vivar (c. 1510–1566) shows the woman Sapphira wearing the same type of hat in *The Story of St Peter and Ananias*, painted for the monastery of San Martín de Valdeiglesias and currently in the Museo del Greco, Toledo. It is therefore possible that Morales knew such details through other iconographic sources.

The success of the iconographic series of the Virgin with Hat is confirmed by the numerous existing versions, almost without variants. This example from the Fondo Cultural Villar Mir is one of the most beautiful and finely executed, since it is possible to appreciate the delicate velature applied in thin layers of colour to achieve the flesh tones and the shades of the garments, and the miniaturesque precision of the brushwork in the undulating golden hair. The composition is based on the two half-length figures of the Virgin and the Christ Child, who embrace each other tenderly against a black background. This is found in other scenes by the artist, but may in this case be related to the iconography of the biblical episode of the flight into Egypt, which took place at night. All the versions employ the same iconographic type of the Virgin, with a delicate face, typical of the artist, that recalls the models of Bernardino Luini (c. 1480–c. 1532) or Domenico Beccafumi (1486–1551). The simple costume, generally identical in every version, consists of a white linen undershirt with black embroidered trimmings (restricted in this version to the shoulder), lettuce edge ruffles on the cuffs and neck, and puffed sleeves bound with ribbons, covered by a blue mantle knotted at the left shoulder. This is invariably accompanied by the originality of her hat, which in this case is green with strips of transparent muslin. The Child always appears with his head upright and his gaze fixed, though the particularity of this version is that his right hand is playing with one of the Virgin’s ringlets, and that he is shown almost nude, with only a yellow cloth slipping down over his legs. Another novelty is the fly resting on the left sleeve of the Virgin’s undershirt, identical to the one Morales adds on the Child’s forehead in *The Virgin and Child with the Infant St John the Baptist* at the Museo del Prado [cat. 11]. Knowing the artist’s iconographic rigour, this should be interpreted as an allusion to the fragility and temporality of earthly things.

Other magnificent autograph versions of this modality which also show the Virgin with her eyes downcast are those in the Colección Arango, outstanding for its exquisite technique achieved with a more reduced colour palette in the clothing [cat. 17], and at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford [fig. 30], which exceptionally fuses the subject with that of the nursing

Virgin by moving the Child to the height of her breast, upon which he lays his right hand. On other occasions, the Virgin looks out at the viewer, as in the version in the Colección Balanzó in Barcelona, or the one from the former Colección Adanero [cat. 52], where the costume is clearly different. All these autograph versions are generally dated around 1567, the year when Bishop Ribera commissioned the painter for two panels on this subject. They fit perfectly with such a date owing to their stylistic connections with other works from the same decade.

There are other Gipsy Virgins that clearly differ in quality, and must be regarded as workshop replicas or copies by the master's followers. Though rather crudely executed, the one at the Discalced Carmelite convent in Alba de Tormes seems to be among the best produced by his workshop. The copy in the Colección Gómez-Moreno, now in a private collection in Madrid, is a very close reproduction of the Villar Mir painting, though with the peculiarity that St Joseph is also included. The version at the monastery of Las Descalzas Reales in Madrid is delicately rendered but excessively stereotyped, and can be considered as the work of a follower of Morales. It could be related through stylistic proximity to the Virgin of the Hat, now in a private collection in Madrid, which was attributed by Mateo to the Portuguese artist Pedro Mata.

Carmen García-Frías Checa

Notes

1. The document is located in the Archive of the Real Colegio Seminario de Corpus Christi in Valencia, and was published in Pérez Sánchez 1977, p. 313.
2. Rodríguez G. de Ceballos 1987, p. 202.
3. For a study of the repertory, see Vaux de Foletier 1966, pp. 165–71.
4. Patrimonio Nacional, inv. 10014740: c. 1515, oil on panel, 135.5 x 190 cm.
5. Patrimonio Nacional, inv. 10014744: first third of the 16th century, oil on panel, 126.1 x 144.5 cm.
6. Mateo 2007, pp. 9 and 19.
7. On the work which may have been owned by the Count of Monteaugudo, see cat. 19 in the current volume.
8. Oil on panel, 81 x 58 cm.
9. For a review of all the extant replicas and copies, see Mateo 2007, pp. 14–24.
10. Patrimonio Nacional, inv. 00610696: second third of the 16th century, oil on canvas, 48 x 40 cm.
11. Mateo 2007, p. 23, fig. 23.