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Luis Salvador Carmona

(Nava del Rey 1708 - Madrid 1767)

SAINT FRANCIS

Ca. 1740-1750

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Polychrome wood

33 x 15 x 14 cm

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The figure of Saint Francis is one of the most reproduced in art in many materials and media owing to the extensive spread and popularity of the order and the worship of its founder, even during his lifetime. Although St Francis' iconography is indeed vast, especially beloved by the Counter-Reformation was that related to the miraculous event of his receiving the wounds of Christ, for the opportunities this presented to realize the esthetics and art of Baroque style.

Hence, the magnificent carving in question depicts the saint standing barefoot, revealing the stigmata on his feet and hands, and also the open wound on his side, perfectly visible through a tear in his habit. In his right hand he is holding a skull that he contemplates with a wistful expression and a concentrated gaze.

This is an elegant and refined piece with a slight *contrapposto* and arching of the body, achieved by positioning one of the legs forward a little while the weight of the body rests on the other, with the knee bent. This posture, together with the subtle tilt of the head and the opening of the arms, endows the figure with a gentle and very-well accomplished naturalistic movement that makes it appear to be moving forward.

He is robed in the traditional Franciscan sackcloth, with a hood and tied at the waist by a rope cincture with the characteristic knots of the order that symbolize his vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. The artist has masterfully succeeded in reproducing the volume, stiffness and dryness of the undulations of the coarse, rough Franciscan serge habit with incredible precision, as well as the folds and creases of the heavy cloth produced by the tight rope around his waist and the movement of the leg and arms. The coloration, in a perfect state of conservation, contributes to the effect, with fine brown stripes on the gray of the habit to replicate this type of crude woolen cloth. The gray color has a symbolic value for the Franciscans in connection with the ash and dust of the human condition, and was the official color of their simple clothing until the mid-18th century.

Of special importance is the mastery of the sculpting of the head, with immense expressive power heightened by the realism produced by the polychrome plus the materials used, that are "alien" to sculpture. It exhibits striking anatomical features that help accentuate his ascetic character, with a gaunt, very sharp face, straight nose, thick and arched eyebrows, and veins on the temples. The eyes are of glass and almond-shaped, sunken and slightly closed. The cheekbones are pronounced and the cheeks hollowed, giving the impression that the skin is clinging to the bone. Carved teeth can be seen through the small, slightly-open mouth. The treatment of the hair, eyebrows, moustache and short, forked beard is executed with great precision and detail. The result is a profound sensation of expressive realism laced with an aura of mysticism, heightened by his concentrated gaze – but with a serene, kindly and gentle face. Of special note also is the incredibly realistic carving of the habit, with great movement in the folds.

This is a piece of exceptional quality and beauty that undeniably corresponds to one of the great masters of Spanish Baroque sculpture. It displays highly-defined technical, stylistic and typological characteristics, and also esthetic and artistic values that make authorship by the Valladolid sculptor Luis Salvador Carmona (1708-1767) easily recognizable.¹ He is unquestionably one of the most prolific of Spanish sculptors, to whom Ceán attributed more than five hundred pieces² and of which around two hundred have been conserved or identified to date. Furthermore, he is also one of the most important Spanish Court sculptors of the first half of the 18th century, who knew how to combine and fuse the traditions of devotional imagery inherited from the height of the Baroque era with the new official esthetic languages of a Europeanizing nature that were gradually establishing themselves in the new century.

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He worked for royal projects on various artistic undertakings related to the decoration of the Royal Palace of La Granja, and formed part of the recently-created Academia de Bellas Artes (Academy of Fine Arts). This official court activity, together with his skill, versatility and the extraordinary technical quality and beauty of his creations, led him to be held in high esteem within artistic circles. This allowed Carmona to enjoy great prestige and extensive patronage among the nobility and ecclesiastical institutions, and as a result brought him a considerable number of commissions from many parts of the Spanish mainland. A direct consequence of this was that his work spread far and wide – even beyond Spanish borders – and also the required coordination of a skilled and perfectly-organized workshop functioning in almost factory-like mode to deliver the enormous number of commissions.³

The piece in question here is a fine example of his facet as an image-maker in polychrome wood, where he reaches the highest levels of his artistic production. It demonstrates how Luis Salvador Carmona knew how to fuse the Baroque religious expressivity and sentiment of Castilian tradition with the esthetic refinement, the elegance and the restraint of the Andalusian school. The results are true images of Baroque devotion, of a well-honed technique and a highly-personal style that was adapted to the requirements of the patrons and the iconography depicted. Notably, the model for his Saint Francis is derived quite clearly from the famous creations that Pedro de Mena rendered on the subject.⁴ It is an especially significant iconography for Salvador Carmona, as his father was a member of the Third Order and the artist himself was even buried in a Franciscan habit. Salvador Carmona took from Mena the artistic values of the lean face, that in Mena responded to the living image of cadaveric pallor. Similarly, the characteristic treatment of the hair and the small, forked beard that Salvador Carmona repeated on the different known interpretations that he

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made of the subject adhere to the formula created by the Andalusian sculptor. As we have said, Salvador Carmona produced various images of Saint Francis among the masterpieces of his production that we have to relate to this sculpture. One of the most notable is the *Saint Francis of Assisi* made for the Church of the Hospital de la Concepción in Yepes, Toledo, first documented in 1740 (Fig. 1).⁵ Closely associated with this is the superb carving of the Italian saint in the Church of Nuestra Señora de Gracia in Estepa, Seville (Fig. 2), for which the sculptor received several payments between 1743 and 1746,⁶ and also the version in Olite, Navarre, circa 1750 (Fig. 3).⁷ Along with these, in the Museo de León (León Museum), an impressive head of the *Saint of Assisi* has been conserved (Fig. 4),⁸ that some have sought to identify with the one that is included in the sculptor's property inventory,⁹ and a small kneeling *Saint Francis Receiving the Stigmata* in Medina de Rioseco.¹⁰ Many other Saint Francises have been associated with the hand of the sculptor or his closest circle.¹¹ In the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando (Royal Academy of Fine Arts of San Fernando) Archives, the manuscript of the "Compendio de la vida y obras de Don Luis Salvador Carmona" (Compendium of the life and works of Don Luis Salvador Carmona) is conserved, dating from 1775. It lists a large number of works by Luis Salvador Carmona. Among those mentioned in the Church of San Fermín de los Navarros is the pair of Saint Anthony and Saint Francis that were destroyed during the Spanish Civil War.¹² However, the dimensions would not permit identification with this small sculpture.



Fig. 1 Luis Salvador Carmona, *Saint Francis*, Church of Nuestra Señora de Gracia in Estepa, Seville.



Fig. 2 Luis Salvador Carmona, *Saint Francis*, Hospital de la Concepción, Yepes, Toledo.

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Fig. 3 Luis Salvador Carmona, *Saint Francis*, Parish Church of Olite, Navarre.



Fig. 4 Luis Salvador Carmona, *Head of Saint Francis*, León Museum.



Fig. 5 Luis Salvador Carmona, *Embrace of Saint Francis and Saint Dominic*, Monasterio de Santo Tomás (Monastery of Saint Thomas), Ávila.

All share similar typological, anatomical, stylistic and technical concepts, with an intense but contained emotional expression, designed to arouse devotion. The piece studied presents a movement and posture that is especially close to the specimens in Estepa and Olite, with which it is directly associated, almost as if it were a smaller version of them. With regard to everything else – highly-similar faces, gestures, stances and treatment – these can be found in other pieces by Salvador Carmona. Especially close are the faces and the anatomical study of the heads of the group of the *Embrace of Saint Francis and Saint Dominic* in the Real Monasterio de Santo Tomás (Royal Monastery of Saint Thomas) in Ávila (Fig. 5); that of *Saint Dominic* in the Convento de San Esteban (Monastery of Saint Stephen)

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in Salamanca (Fig. 6); *Saint John the Baptist* in Estepa; Saint Francis Xavier of the Royal Palace of La Granja in San Ildefonso and the version now disappeared from the Church of San Fermín de los Navarros in Madrid;¹³ that of the *Virgin Mary Giving the Rosary to Saint Dominic de Guzmán* in Artzentales (Biscay) (Fig. 7),¹⁴ and also that of Saint John of Nepomuk in the Church of San Miguel y San Julián in Valladolid.¹⁵ With regard to others, the serene, concentrated face relates it to the features of Carmona's beautiful Christs, the most notable of which is that of the Museo Nacional de Escultura (National Sculpture Museum), signed by the Valladolid artist (Fig. 8).



Fig. 6 Luis Salvador Carmona, *Saint Dominic*, Monastery of Saint Stephen, Salamanca.



Fig. 7 Detail of the group of the *Virgin Mary Giving the Rosary to Saint Dominic de Guzmán*, Artzentales, Biscay.



Fig. 8 Luis Salvador Carmona, *Christ on the Cross*, National Sculpture Museum, Valladolid.

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In all events, as indicated above, the extraordinary quality and perfection in his handling of the gouge are reflected in the refined technique the piece exhibits, both in the way of treating the face of the saint as well as in the folds of his clothing. These reveal painstaking care and a veristic reproduction through angular, furrowed and sinuous crafting, to render the weight and stiffness peculiar to the cloth. The combination of folds and undulations in different directions creates a sensation of movement. Also especially striking is the deep central crease or fold that brings into play the contrast of light and shadows.

To summarize, this is an unprecedented piece that is unquestionably ascribed to Luis Salvador Carmona and should be ranked among the masterpieces fashioned by his gouges during the middle years of the height of his career. His ability to combine traditions and his outstanding quality earned him recognition, success and a growing fame that led him to engage in a dazzling display of activity to meet an overwhelming demand, the reason that explains his extensive work and its remarkable geographical spread.

ÁLVARO PASCUAL CHENEL

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NOTES

1. A considerable amount of literature exists on the sculptor. Apart from the very many articles and news documents on specific works and groups of works, the comprehensive studies by García Gaínza, María Concepción, *El escultor Luis Salvador Carmona*, Pamplona, 1990 and Martín González, Juan José, *Luis Salvador Carmona. Escultor y académico*, Madrid, 1990 make essential reading, that include all the previous related literature. Since then, the most notable experts on the sculptor have continued to publish important and numerous works of a diverse nature that significantly expand both the catalogue of his works and also our knowledge of biographical, documentary and educational aspects, etc. Among these, it is worth mentioning the contributions by Urrea Fernández, Nicolau Castro, Martín González and García Gaínza, along with others. All the related literature appears updated in the catalogue of the *Luis Salvador Carmona (1708-1767)* exhibition, in Nava del Rey, 2009. A key bibliographic milestone was also the conference on the artist that took place in 2008 with major studies, that was published in 2013 under the title *El escultor Luis Salvador Carmona (1708-1767). Conmemoración del III centenario de su nacimiento. Actas del IV coloquio nacional sobre la cultura en Andalucía. Cuadernos de Estepa series*, no. 2, 2013.
2. Ceán Bermúdez, Juan Agustín, *Diccionario Histórico de los más ilustres Profesores de las Bellas Artes en España*, Madrid, 1800, volume IV, p. 311.
3. García Gaínza, María Concepción and Chocarro Bujanda, Carlos, "Inventario de bienes del escultor Luis Salvador Carmona", *Academia*, no. 86, 1998, pp. 297-326.
4. See also and as a summary *The Sacred made real. Spanish painting and sculpture 1600-1700*, exhibition catalogue, Valladolid, 2010, no. 34, p. 184.
5. Nicolau Castro, Juan, "Aportaciones a la escultura de Luis Salvador Carmona y Juan Pascual de Mena", *Boletín del Seminario de Estudios de Arte y Arqueología*, no. 54, 1988, pp. 466-467.
6. Recio, Martín, "¿Un San Francisco de Salvador Carmona en Estepa?", *Archivo Español de Arte*, no. 187, pp. 330-331; Díaz Fernández, Ezequiel, "La obra del escultor Luis Salvador Carmona en Estepa", *Boletín de Arte*, no. 23, 2002, pp. 253-280.
7. García Gaínza, María Concepción, *El escultor Luis Salvador Carmona...*, op. cit., p. 91.
8. Martín González, Juan José, *Escultura barroca en España, 1600-1770*, Madrid, 1983, p. 390; Díaz Fernández, Ezequiel, "Analogía escultórica entre la obra leonesa y sevillana de Luis Salvador Carmona", *De Arte*, no. 3, 2004, pp. 136-138.
9. García Gaínza, María Concepción and Chocarro Bujanda, Carlos, "Inventario de bienes del escultor Luis Salvador Carmona", op. cit., pp. 304-305.
10. *Luis Salvador Carmona (1708-1767)*, exhibition catalogue, no.7, pp. 36-38.
11. Nicolau Castro, Juan, "En torno a Luis Salvador Carmona y la escultura de su tiempo", *Boletín del Seminario de Estudios de Arte y Arqueología*, no., 56, p. 563; Ramírez Martínez, José Manuel, "Luis Salvador Carmona en Lumbreras de Cameros y Calahorra", *Kalakoritos*, no. 2, 1997, pp. 97-113; Urrea Fernández, Jesús, "Luis Salvador Carmona en el País Vasco, Navarra y Castilla", in *El escultor Luis Salvador Carmona (1708-1767). Conmemoración del III centenario de su nacimiento...*, op. cit., pp. 57-70; Tabar de Anitua, Fernando, "En las Calatravas de Madrid. Un maestro, Villabrille; un discípulo, Salvador Carmona y un rival, Pascual de Mena", in *El escultor Luis Salvador Carmona (1708-1767). Conmemoración del III centenario de su nacimiento*, op. cit., pp. 174-175.
12. Martín González, Juan José, *Luis Salvador Carmona...*, op. cit., p. 30.
13. García Gaínza, María Concepción, *Luis Salvador Carmona en San Fermín de los Navarros*, Madrid, 1990.
14. Martín González, Juan José, *Luis Salvador Carmona...*, op. cit., p. 277; García Gaínza, María Concepción, *El escultor Luis Salvador Carmona...*, op. cit., p. 90; Zorroza Santisteban, Julen, "Nuevas aportaciones a la obra de Luis Salvador Carmona en Vizcaya", in *El escultor Luis Salvador Carmona (1708-1767). Conmemoración del III centenario de su nacimiento...*, op. cit., pp. 144-150.
15. *Luis Salvador Carmona (1708-1767)*, exhibition catalogue, op. cit., no. 9, pp. 42-44.