

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



Nicolás Rodríguez Juárez
(Mexico City 1667 – 1734)

Our Lady of Guadalupe

oil on copper

signed (lower left): *Nicolaes Rodriguez
Xuarez. Clericus Presbyter fecit*

21 x 15 cm.; 8.2 x 5.9 in.

Provenance

Private Collection.

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Nicolás Rodríguez Juárez was born in Mexico City in 1667 to a dynasty of renowned New Spanish painters. He first dipped his brushes at the workshop of his father, Antonio Rodríguez, finally becoming a Master Painter in December 1687.¹

He and his brother, Juan Rodríguez Juárez, have been considered by historians of Viceroyalty art as the major exponents of the “*second Mexican Baroque*”,² where the soft lighting and tempered coloring formed a nexus with the work of Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, while also presaging Rococo and pointing to the presence of Cristóbal de Villalpando as the main artistic points of reference.³

His late period, marked by the death of his wife and his subsequent taking of the cloth, was defined by a change in style that the artist reinforced and combined with a modification of his normal signature, by including the word *presbíter*, or priest. A new pictorial stage, to which we should date the little copper (previously unpublished) we are presenting here, and in whose lower left corner we can read “*Nicolaes Rodriguez Xuarez. Clerieus Presbyter fecit*”. In the light of the above, we can date the creation of this Guadalupe to a period ranging between 1722, the date at which Rodríguez Juárez, having been ordained, is known to have examined the miraculous “tilma”, and 1734, the year he is recorded as having died.

The Our Lady of Guadalupe iconography,⁴ which in New Spain was the most venerated out of the entire Marian repertory, originated in the so-called Miracle of the Roses from the *Nican Mopohua* text, which narrates the apparition of Our Lady of Guadalupe to the indigenous Juan Diego on the hill of Tepeyac. This legend from 1531 tells how the Virgin asked Juan Diego to request Friar Bishop Juan de Zumárraga build a temple in her name, leaving an impression of her image on the former’s cloak, or “tilma”.

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As such, the original image in which the Virgin appeared in this miraculous tale was, and it continues to be so today, the testimony borne by Viceroyalty artists devoted to depicting it over the centuries, and which Rodríguez Juárez chose to portray both on this occasion and in at least two other known works with similar characteristics, the first of which is preserved in the Museo de América in Madrid (fig. 1), while the second is housed in a private Spanish collection.

Turning to the composition of the work, simple and yet smooth and luminous, we see the Virgin, depicted standing full length facing the devotee, her left knee slightly bent. Identified as an indigenous Virgin, yet with European features, she has dark skin, rendered in a range of grey tones, as are her hands, clasped together in the middle of her breast in prayer, and where the scene is imbued with a serene mysticism, also heightened by the downward tilt of her face which has been lent an ingenuous beauty.

Draped over Our Lady's shoulders, we observe a blue cloak dotted with gold stars arranged in exactly the same fashion as in the work from the Madrid museum. The cloak, which covers the Virgin's head on top of which it accommodates her crown, opens symmetrically on both sides, revealing a pinkish-colored, decorated robe covering the body of the future Mother of God. The robe, fastened at her neck, is gathered up into folds around her feet. A cherubim is seen to be holding the excess fabric, supported on a crescent moon, which also serves as a platform for the Virgin, while opening his tricolored wings and tilting his face towards his left shoulder in a clear gesture of respect.

It is worth mentioning a few compositional elements essential to the strict representation of this Marian iconography, such as the aureole surrounding the figure of the Virgin and which, emulating sunbeams, gives way to a host of clouds that serve as a pictorial frame, delimiting the sides of the copper thanks to the artist's deft white brushstrokes.

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The signature, in the lower, left-hand corner, has survived intact, as has that of the work from the Spanish private collection (fig. 2), and which, as opposed to the piece from the Madrid museum, has not been subject to incisions made to the copper plate with the intention of adapting the painting to the frame and, as such, respecting and maintaining the original value of this exquisite work of art.⁵

I would suggest that this copper, signed in the lower left-hand corner, was intended to serve as a protective amulet for some Spanish citizen who, having made his fortune, was undertaking his own personal *tornaviaje* (return journey) to the Old World, familiar with the superstitious mysticism that had, mouth to mouth and century by century, enshrouded the epic tale of the most venerated virginal image.

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Figure 1. Nicolás Rodríguez Juárez, *Our Lady of Guadalupe*, oil on copper. Museo de América

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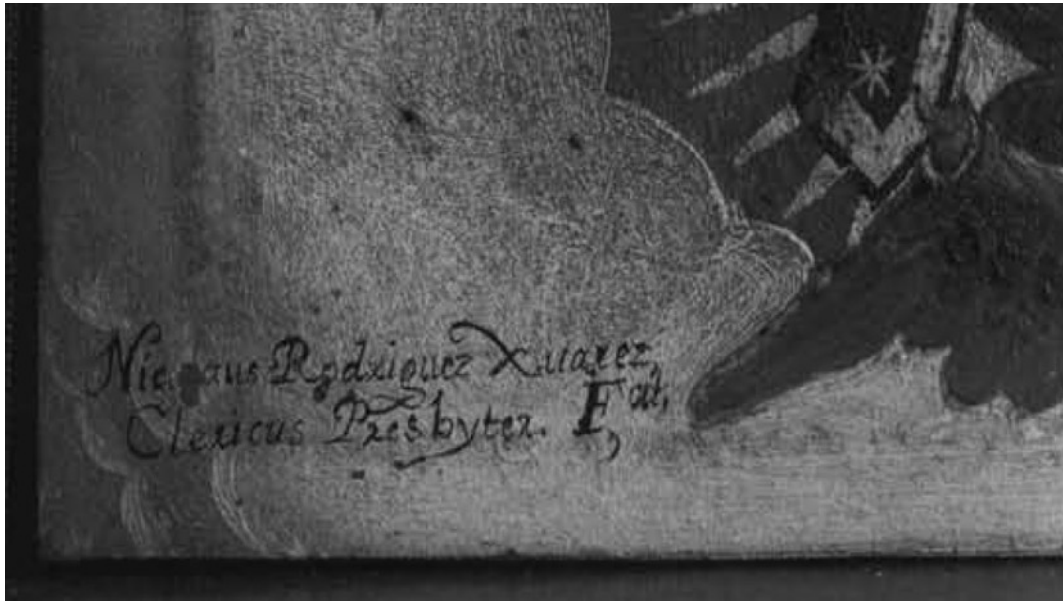


Figure 2. Nicolás Rodríguez Juárez, *Our Lady of Guadalupe*, oil on copper. Private Collection

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Footnotes

¹ In the absence of a monograph on the Mexican painter, see the following publications for biographical references: E. Marco Dorta, 'Arte en América y Filipinas', *Ars Hispaniae*, vol. 21, Madrid 1973, pp. 337-51; M. Toussaint, *Pintura colonial en México*, Mexico 1965, pp.146-49; and T. Gisbert de Mesa, 'Arte Iberoamericano desde la colonización a la Independencia', *Summa Artis*, vol. 28, Madrid 1985.

² M. Burke, *Arte Novohispano. Pintura y escultura en Nueva España. El Barroco*, Mexico 1992, p. 135.

³ M. Burke, *Arte Novohispano. Pintura y escultura en Nueva España. El Barroco*, Mexico 1992, p. 135.

⁴ One of the most comprehensive studies on this type of Marian iconography is J. González Moreno, *Iconografía guadalupana*, 2 vols., Mexico 1959.

⁵ R. Domínguez Casas, *op. cit.*, vol. 62, 1966, p. 431.