

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



Attributed to Miguel González
(Mexico, active second half of the 17th
century)

Saint Ignatius of Loyola and Saint Francis Xavier

late 17th century

oil on mother-of-pearl on wooden panel

44.5 x 62.5 cm.; 17.5 x 24.6 in.

(unframed)

68.5 x 86 cm.; 27 x 33.8 in.

(framed)

Provenance

Private Collection, London.

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The work we are presenting here is a previously unpublished and unusual example of the *enconchado* technique, a hybrid pictorial genre with roots in New Spanish Baroque, involving the combination of oil and tempera painting with mother-of-pearl inlay.

With a scope of production limited to the Viceroyalty of New Spain during the period 1650-1750,¹ it is believed that the González family of artists were the driving force of this much-admired and reclaimed artform. Although the growing body of research aimed at documenting and extending our knowledge of this technique has thrown up a series of new names connected to mother-of-pearl workshops, such as Nicolás Correa, Agustín del Pino, Pedro López Calderón and a mysterious figure called Rodulpho, there is no doubt that the main focus of attention in terms of quantity and quality continues to be on Juan and Miguel González. It is to the latter, who we know left a large part of his output unsigned,² that we attribute authorship of this work.

The composition, arranged vertically, is unique in iconographic terms, with the one single parallel (with numerous contrasts in subject and technique) found to date being a *Saint Thomas Aquinas preaching from a Pulpit*, an *enconchado* belonging to a private collection in Seville. In both cases, the main focus is the sacrament of the Eucharist, the material symbol of the presence of God on earth, represented through His body in our work and through His blood in the Andalusian panel.

It is as such that the work we are examining here, which may be interpreted as a “defense and veneration of the Most Holy Sacrament” was in all likelihood the result of a commission made by some Jesuit congregation, judging by the “IHS” seal that can be seen to the mid-left of the panel. This symbol, a monogram of Christ’s name, was adopted by St. Ignatius of Loyola, founding father of the Company of Jesus, and the figure depicted on the left of the composition. Opposite him, on the right, we find St. Francis Xavier, illustrious Jesuit and faithful companion of the founder of the Order in countless portraits.

Both figures, dressed in the clothing of the religious community, are wearing black habits, adorned with little pieces of mother-of-pearl that provide the sumptuousness and elegance

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demanded by the composition, and add the iridescence sought by this kind of *enconchado* work. The scene is taking place symmetrically around an altar decorated with a red cloth featuring inlaid geometrical decorations reminiscent of Japanese lacquerware known as *namban*, and on the front of which we can once again see the Jesuit Christogram “IHS”, with more evidence of the influence of this Japanese artform. Despite producing similar aesthetic results, *namban* lacquerware is executed using a completely different technical process, and little light has been shed to date on quite how this Oriental artform came to influence Mexican *enconchado* work.

Standing over the altar, occupying the central part of the composition and being held aloft by three cherubim, is the monstrance, oversized to match its importance, and strategically arranged so as to be worshipped by both saints. The monstrance is made up of large pieces of mother-of-pearl in their natural color, from the foot right up to the virile, and including the stem and crown. The only decorative elements to be seen in the holy receptacle are two vertical parallel gold bands on both sides of the virile, in the same color as the aureole that surrounds the entire monstrance. Above that, enveloping the entire composition and pointing to the artistic *fattura* of Miguel González, is the canopy. Its drapes hang down in parallel from the top middle section of the image, tracing out a sort of triangle, in tones of red and orange and decorated with flowers made up of mother-of-pearl inlay and brush-strokes, a device extremely similar to what we find in the González panel *Apparition of Christ to the Virgin* (fig. 1) from the Museo de América in Madrid, and also highly reminiscent of the *Evangelical Scene* (fig. 2) housed at the same museum and also attributed to the Mexican master.

Finally, but of no less importance, it would be remiss of us to pass over the work executed on the frame, to which the artist gave the prominent role characteristic of González pieces. As such, we see how the artist has integrated the frame into the overall work, applying the same mother-of-pearl technique seen in the rest of the panel, but with a contrasting aesthetic effect that means it bears a greater resemblance to the aforementioned *namban* artform thanks to the application of ornamental floral motifs, volutes and acanthus leaves arranged symmetrically against a blackish background.

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Figure 1. Miguel González (attributed to), *Apparition of Christ to the Virgin*, oil and mother-of-pearl, 17th century, Museo de América, Madrid

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Figure 2. Miguel González (attributed to), *Evangelical Scene*, oil and mother-of-pearl on wooden panel, 17th century, Museo de América, Madrid

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Footnotes

¹ OCAÑA RUÍZ, S. (2013), p. 126.

² OCAÑA RUIZ, S. 2013 p. 126.