

COLNAGHI

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JOSÉ RISUEÑO

(Grenada 1665-1721)

REST ON THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT

polychrome terracotta

50 x 65 x 28 cm; 19 1/2 x 25 1/2 x 11 in.

Provenance

Pedro Stevenin, Argentina, first half of the 20th century;
By descent to Andres Pedro Stevenin;
Private collection, Argentina.

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This tender and impressive work by the Grenadian artist José Risueño epitomises the exquisite quality of southern Spanish Baroque sculpture.

Dressed in deep blues and dazzling reds, the Virgin Mary, Saint Joseph, and the infant Christ are depicted fleeing Judea for Egypt to escape King Herod, who sought to kill the young Jesus. The chubby Redeemer, fast asleep, grabs onto his mother's cloak as she lovingly supports him. Saint Joseph crosses his hands in adoration as he casts his gaze down, almost as if he were catching his breath after a tumultuous journey. Though the flight into Egypt has a rich pictorial history, the delicacy and intimacy of the scene makes Grenadian polychrome sculpture arguably the ideal medium for depicting the scene.

Grenada has a rich history of polychrome sculpture, even before Risueño's lifetime. As a child in the Southern Spanish city, the artist was exposed to the masterful work of Alonso Cano (1601-1667) and Pedro de Mena (1628-1688), which he was able to study in the many of the city's religious buildings, and in particular, Grenada's Cathedral (as his family lived opposite the church). As he developed as an artist, he received important commissions from the cathedral council, such as the relief of the Birth of Christ, sculpted in stone for the main facade of the cathedral, and large format paintings representing the Coronation of Saint Rosalia and the Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine, in which he exhibited his mastery of multi-figure compositions in addition to his great skill in portraiture. His commissions came mostly from Granada, with his clients being principally the cathedral, archbishopric, and the Abbey of Sacro Monte.

Though the artist was also masterful in painting and stone carving, Risueño's small polychrome statuettes are the works that have garnered the most interest during the twentieth century on account of their immediacy and their delicate technique. These works of art can be found throughout Granada in convents and churches, such as the School of Ave María de Granada, the churches of la Trinidad de Córdoba and las Angustias de Priego de Córdoba, and the museum of Fine Arts, Granada, as well as international collections.

Comparing the present sculpture with the *Saint Joseph with the Christ Child* in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (**Fig. 1**), one can appreciate Risueño's ability to convey a range of emotions not only through painted expressions, but also in the manner in which he handles the clothes of his figures. In the present scene of tranquillity, the artist makes the Holy Family's garb elegantly drape over the sculpture, whilst in the latter work, the much more fraught expression of Saint Joseph is matched in his more agitated drapery. This manner of conveying emotion through every part of the sculpted figure is typical of Risueño, and of Baroque sculpture writ large (this so-called *panneggio psicologico* having first been introduced by Gianlorenzo Bernini).

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Fig. 1. José Risueño, *St. Joseph with the Christ Child*, circa 1720.
London, Victoria and Albert Museum.