

# COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



Luis Berrueco

(Puebla (Mexico), active 1717-1750)

*Our Lady of Refuge*

oil on canvas

80 x 55 cm.; 31 1/2 x 21 5/8 in.

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Provenance

Private Collection, Spain.

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Active in Puebla during the first half of the 18th century, Luis Berrueco was the most prominent painter of a group that included five others sharing the same surname, and which formed a family dynasty.<sup>1</sup> We also know that he learnt his trade under the guidance of Juan Correa, the latter therefore being one of his benchmark figures.<sup>2</sup>

With regard to Berrueco's artistic output, it is worth highlighting the fact that he was one of the first artists to develop the *Castas* painting genre<sup>3</sup> (fig. 1). His career was largely linked to the aforementioned city of Puebla, although his work was also popular in Atlixco, Tlaxcala, Aguascalientes, San Luis Potosí and Querétaro, due to his close connections with the Jesuit and Franciscan Orders, from which he received numerous commissions. Large part of his work is currently scattered between various institutions, such as the Museo de la Universidad Autónoma in Puebla, the Museo de Chapultepec in Mexico City, the Museo Regional in Querétaro, and Madrid's Museo de América.

The subject of the work we are addressing here refers to Our Lady of Refuge, a Marian title originating from Italy, and which over the years became popular in other parts of the world, largely thanks to the dissemination carried out by religious missionaries. The advocacy itself was created and popularized by Antonio Baldinucci (1665 – 1717)<sup>4</sup> who, according to Father Francisco de Florencia, "*Deseaba grandemente tener una imagen de la Santísima Virgen, que fuera su Compañera, Guía y Maestra en las Misiones. Para esto llamó a un pintor de los menos afamados de Roma, y habiéndole dado la idea, consiguió con sus oraciones que saliese la imagen tan perfecta que tuvieron mucho que celebrar y admirar los Maestros más acreditados en el arte de la pintura*".<sup>5</sup>

Baldinucci is therefore considered the person who first popularized this advocacy, as he bore the image with him like a standard wherever he went in Italy, it even being considered by many a miraculous painting as, "*Con el favor de María Santísima esta Soberana Imagen consiguió innumerables conversiones de pecadores, y la reformación de sus costumbres*"<sup>6</sup> (With the favor of Mary the Most Holy, this Supreme Image was successful in converting countless sinners, and reforming their habits).

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The image soon took on such prominence and fame that, following numerous requests, on 4 July 1717 it was crowned by order of Pope Clement XI in the Jesuit church in Frascati.<sup>7</sup> It was from that point on that Baldinucci gave it the title of *Refugium Peccatorum* (Refuge of Sinners), an advocacy which, over time, would end up evolving into Our Lady of Refuge.

Two years later, in 1719, his fellow Jesuit Juan José de Giuca, present at the act of canonical coronation, ordered a print be made of the image in order to take it with him on future evangelical missions to New Spain, following Baldinucci's example. It was thus that veneration of Our Lady of Refuge ended up reaching the city of Puebla and, from there, quickly spread to other regions throughout the Viceroyalty, such as the Bajío region or the state of Zacatecas, always linked to the mission of the Order of the Society of Jesus.<sup>8</sup> This Virginal advocacy was widely venerated from the very beginning, with a temple even being built in Our Lady's name at an early date in Puebla, and numerous niches and tabernacles with Her image appearing scattered throughout the streets of the city. De Florencia tells us that images venerating Our Lady of Refuge were equally present in the homes of the social elite as in those of the humblest classes.<sup>9</sup> This bears witness to the great work carried out by the Jesuits in spreading the Faith, both in terms of the evangelization of the natives and in converting sinners.

With regard specifically to the work being addressed here, we can clearly see how Baldinucci's original idea is expressed with exactitude. The composition is adapted to an oval frame within which the sole protagonists are the Virgin and Child in the foreground. The seated Mary has the infant Christ on her lap, standing up on one foot and, in a gesture of affection, both their faces come together. To heighten this tender aspect even further, the Child is holding onto his Mother's thumb, while she supports his chest and back.

It is also extremely common for these sorts of compositions to feature their subjects wearing rich and ostentatious clothing, along with jewelry, aspects that Berruenco includes in his work, drawing in part on his training with Juan Correa. In the case of the Virgin, she appears in a red robe with gilt plant and floral brocade all over, and a blue cloak with lace trim and a border featuring plant motifs along the hem, also gilt, as are the eight-pointed stars over the

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surface of the garment and the monographs of Mary (crowned MAR) and Saint Joseph (JOSEPH).<sup>10</sup> The Child, meanwhile, is dressed simply in a light transparent silk robe with details embroidered on the collar and cuffs. In addition, and in the interests of modesty, the Virgin casually conceals the Infant Christ's private parts with a white cloth.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the iconography is the inclusion of items of jewelry, in this case a necklace of fine pearls and a brooch on the Virgin's breast, with precious cabochon stones set in it, lending the Mother of God a contemporary appearance, akin to that of a noblewoman of New Spain.<sup>11</sup>

Finally, it is worth mentioning another of the key attributes accompanying the iconography of this Marian image, crowns, alluding to the act of canonical coronation of 1717, this being represented for posterity. Once again, within the lavish aesthetic Berrueco was aiming to achieve, the Virgin gains in prominence and opulence, with a great gold crown with inlaid emerald cabochons, matching the smaller crown worn by the Infant Christ, added to the aureole of golden rays given off by both figures as a sign of their divine character.

Luis Berrueco must have carried out a number of works depicting this subject throughout his professional career, with perhaps the closest example to the one we are studying here being a canvas on display in the Museo de la Basílica de Guadalupe in Mexico City, which also features the artist's signature (fig. 2). Their iconographic characteristics are practically identical, right down to the ostentatious and lavish appearance of the clothing, where we once again observe the same decorative gilt plant motifs. The execution and technique are also extremely similar, something that becomes all the clearer in the skillful *fattura* in the transparencies of the Child's robe. Only the slightest of changes may be appreciated, such as in the background of the composition, which in this case attempts a *trompe l'oeil* effect, as if the figures were arranged inside a niche or a frame. Also striking is the greater profusion of monograms on the Virgin's cloak, this time including the Christogram.

In much the same way, although with reference to a different subject matter, one might compare our work with the painting of *The Divine Pilgrim*, signed by Berrueco, and on

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display at the Museo Regional de Querétaro (fig. 3). We once again witness the same features and tender gesture between the Child and his Mother, whose physical appearance is also similar to the work we are studying here. The same goes for the use of lavish fabrics, jewelry and precious stones as worn by the Virgin.

Another signed work is the canvas depicting Saint Joseph and Child from the church of San Félix in Atlixco. Berrueco once again portrays that same tender look, this time between Father and Son, while the Infant Christ shares the same physical characteristics mentioned earlier, once again dressed in a transparent robe of an extremely similar *fattura*. Turning to Joseph's crown, we see how it matches the model from Our Lady of Refuge, as do the sunrays emitted by both figures.

Such was the fervor felt for Our Lady of Refuge during the 18th century, that the leading New Spanish artists of the day dedicated numerous works to her image, always following the model of the print brought by Father Giuca. As such, we could also mention the following names: Gabriel de Zúñiga, with characteristics that are close to those of our work; José de Páez (fig. 4), more decorative, with a floral frame and Miguel Cabrera, with a common variation featuring the Child standing on a cloud rather than on his Mother's lap, and also with a floral frame.

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Figure 1. Luis Berrueco, *Castas Painting*, 18<sup>th</sup> century. Museo de América, Madrid



Figure 2. Luis Berrueco, *Our Lady of Refuge*, 18<sup>th</sup> century. Museo de la Basílica de Guadalupe, Puebla

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**Figure 3.** Luis Berruenco, *The Divine Pilgrim*, 18<sup>th</sup> century. Museo Regional de Querétaro, Mexico



**Figure 4.** José de Páez, *Our Lady of Refuge*, 18<sup>th</sup> century. Museo Andrés Blaisten, Mexico City



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## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> These are currently recorded under the names Diego, Miguel, Pablo, José and Mariano, all being the sons of Luis Berrueco. M<sup>a</sup> C. FRAGA GONZÁLEZ, 1999, p. 78.

<sup>2</sup> Of African descent, in the last decades of the 17th century, Juan Correa cultivated a Baroque style based on an interest in lavish decoration and opulence, marked in turn by the search for luminosity and golden tones. His skills as an artist were unrivalled throughout his prolific career, and it is worth highlighting three large-scale canvases undertaken for the Catedral Metropolitana in Mexico City. M., TOUSSAINT, 1990, p. 119.

<sup>3</sup> A pictorial genre generally linked to New Spanish artists from the 18th century, based on the depiction of variations resulting from the intermixing of races, between whites, indigenous natives and blacks. Works are made up of two adults and a child, alongside a cartouche explaining the correct terminology to use when referring to each of them.

<sup>4</sup> A Jesuit monk who carried out evangelical missions in Italy, mainly in the cities of Viterbo and Frascati. He was beatified by Pope Leon XIII in 1893, K., RUIZ CUEVAS, 2012, p. 1211.

<sup>5</sup> F., FLORENCIA, 1755, p. 189. Translation: greatly desired to have an image of the Holy Virgin, who would be Companion, Guide and Mistress of the Missions. To this end he called for one of the most renowned painters in Rome and, having given him the idea, through his prayers attained so perfect an image that the most respected Masters in the art of painting had great cause to celebrate and admire it.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 1755, p. 190. Translation: with the favor of Mary the Most Holy, this Supreme Image was successful in converting countless sinners, and reforming their habits.

<sup>7</sup> K., RUIZ CUEVAS, 2012, p. 1212.

<sup>8</sup> "Hubo tal conmoción en todas partes, que para fomentar el amor y devoción para con la Señora del Refugio, se imprimieron en varias láminas más de cuatrocientas mil estampas, que en breve se expandieron porque de todas partes las pedían". (There was such commotion everywhere that, in order to foster love and devotion for Our Lady of Refuge, more than four-hundred thousand prints were made on various plates, which were soon disseminated because they were in demand everywhere.) F., FLORENCIA, 1755, p. 190.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 1755, p. 191.

<sup>10</sup> It is more common for the Christogram to appear next to Mary's monogram, but there are a few rare cases, like this one, where it is replaced by the monogram of St. Joseph.

<sup>11</sup> M. A., CASTILLO OREJA, 2008, p. 326.