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Francisco Pacheco
(Sanlúcar de Barrameda 1564 – 1644 Seville)

Lilies in ceramic urns
from Tonalá

a pair, both oil on panel

Each: 21 x 22 cm.; 8 1/4 x 8 5/8 in.



Provenance

From the *predella* of an altarpiece formerly in the Hospital de la Mendicidad, Seville (no longer extant);

Private collection.

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Francisco Pérez del Río, son of Juan Pérez and Leonor del Río, used the surname of Pacheco, as he is known today, which he took from an uncle of the same name. That family member, a graduate and canon of Seville cathedral who was notably involved in the city's cultural life, soon offered the artist his protection and assisted him in terms of his social recognition and ascent. Aged just 21 and following his apprenticeship in the studio of the Sevillian painter Luis Fernández, an artist affiliated with the Mannerist trend, Francisco Pacheco is recorded as a master painter, renting a house on Calle de los Limones in Seville.

In early 1594 he married María Ruiz de Páramo and soon became established as one of the best painters in Seville, appointed by his fellow guild members to the post of 'overseer of the profession of painting'. In 1618 the Tribunal of the Inquisition appointed him 'inspector of sacred paintings'.

At the start of the second decade of the 17th century, Pacheco went to El Escorial and Toledo, taking full advantage of the opportunity to study the royal collections and the working methods of El Greco, whom he visited in his studio there. As a master himself, in his Seville studio Pacheco trained the young Alonso Cano, Francisco López Caro and Diego Velázquez, the latter marrying his daughter Juana Pacheco.

Pacheco's theoretical contributions to his profession are set out in his text *Arte de la pintura, su antigüedad y su grandeza*, published a few years after his death.¹ In this work he expressed his concept of painting as a Liberal Art. He also left an unfinished manuscript entitled *Libro de descripción de verdaderos retratos de ilustres y memorables varones*, which comprises 56 portraits drawn in red and black chalk, executed between 1599 and 1644.

Over the course of his lengthy career, Pacheco produced numerous drawings, portraits, mythological compositions (ceilings of the Casa de Pilatos, Seville), and above all canvases

¹ Seville: Simón Fajardo, 1649.

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and panels on religious subjects. He must also have painted a number of still lifes, as demonstrated by this pair of panels with their decorative and symbolic depiction of lilies.

The presence of cut stems of white lilies (*Lilium candidum*) in Tonalá ceramic vessels - considered luxury items during this period - casts some light on the function of these unique decorative paintings. They offer pictorial proof of the high demand for Tonalteca-ware within court circles in 17th-century Spain, an appreciation also evident in still lifes by other artists such as Juan van der Hamen and Antonio de Pereda. Vessels of this type of Mexican red pottery, which was made with scented clay that gave the water stored in it a special fragrance and taste, are recorded in some early inventories as '*barro bucarino de Guadalajara de Indias*' ['a clay vessel from Guadalajara in the Indies']. In the present case the jars, with their characteristic burnished surface, have wide mouths, two handles on the body and the same floral decoration.

Located against a plain background and adapted to fit the pictorial space, the sturdy leafy stalks of the lilies and the pure and majestic flowers of the bell-shaped lily (associated with purity) are precisely and delicately painted, each with six, separate lance-shaped petals in addition to the pictorial detail of the stamens and anthers.

A comparison of the lily flowers in these two paintings and those seen in *The Immaculate Conception* in the archiepiscopal palace in Seville of around 1610, in *The Immaculate Conception with Vázquez de Leca* (1621; private collection, Seville), in *The Immaculate Conception* in the parish church of San Lorenzo in Seville, and in *Saint Dominic de Guzmán* in the Museo de Bellas Artes de Seville, as well as with the roses in *The Immaculate Conception with Miguel del Cid* in Seville cathedral (1619), substantiates the argument for an attribution of the present pair of panels to Francisco Pacheco. Another example of the artist's flowers appears in *The Mystic Marriage of Saint Agnes* (1628) in the Museo de Bellas Artes de Sevilla.

With regard to painted depictions of ceramics, mention should be made of the pair of canvases by Pacheco depicting the potter saints Justa and Rufina in a private collection.

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Pacheco's appreciation of flower painting is demonstrated in a short commentary in his *Arte de la pintura*, in chapter VII, entitled 'On burnished and matte gilding on a range of materials and on the painting of flowers, fruit and landscapes'. The text reads: 'The painting of flowers, imitated from life in Spring can be very entertaining; and some have been eminent in this field, particularly the famous Florencio in Flanders, whose portrait can be seen among the illustrious Flemish Painters. Neither was antiquity lacking in this amusing genre, for the founder of this type of painting was Pausias Sicionius. In his youth he fell in love with Glisera, a maker of garlands, and in imitation of her he brought to art an innumerable variety of flowers. And he painted his Lady seated and making a garland: which painting was called *stephanopoli* as Glisera made her living from selling garlands. In Athens, Lucius Luculus bought a copy of this panel for two talents. In our own time there is no want of painters who are fond of the entertainment afforded by this genre, which can be easily learned and gives delight by its variety. Among those who have done it with power and skill can be counted Jan van der Hamen, member of King Philip IV's royal guard of archers. Oil painting is most suitable for this genre because you can retouch numerous times and refine the colours so that they truly imitate natural flowers. You must also master the painting of vases of glass, clay, silver and gold and the little baskets in which flowers are usually placed, and the choice of lighting and the arrangement of all these things. And occasionally good painters can amuse themselves this way, although not with much glory, given the nature of these paintings.'

This previously unpublished pair of paintings by Francisco Pacheco open up a new direction with regard to the pictorial corpus of this Andalusian painter and theoretician, given that until now almost no still lifes by the artist have been known, aside from the canvas *Christ served by the Angels in the Desert* of 1616, painted for the refectory of the convent of San Clemente in Seville and now in the Musée Goya in Castres (268 x 418 cm.; inv. no. 93-1-1), which has a small still life on the table. One other example is a pair of panels (present whereabouts unknown) published by Valdivieso and Serrera,² which depict a *Vase of lilies*

² E. Valdivieso & J. M. Serrera, *Pintura sevillana del primer tercio del siglo XVII*, Madrid 1985, nos. 291-92, pl. 87. Oil on panels, each 40 x 40 cm.

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and a *Vase of roses* and which were part of the *predella* of an altarpiece formerly in the aforementioned, no longer extant Hospital de la Mendicidad in Seville. On the basis of their characteristics, those two panels and the present two may have been part of the same work.

Bearing in mind the specific subject of these two floral compositions by Pacheco, it seems probable that they formed part of the decoration of a chapel dedicated to the Virgin, their symbolism highlighting purity and innocence and as such offering a visual representation of Mary's virginity.

Both panels are similarly inscribed *Pacheco*. in ink on the reverse and both have identical labels with numbering and the annotation *M. de E./ G B*. Each painting has a simple gilded moulding with a recessed inner section, two straight parallel sides on the top and bottom and two curved sides.

A note on the provenance

The present two panels are from the *predella* of an altarpiece formerly in the Hospital de la Mendicidad in Seville, which is no longer extant. This altarpiece was very probably dedicated to the Immaculate Conception, as suggested by the symbolic values of the lily flowers depicted here. The front panel of the altarpiece's tabernacle, which depicted the Christ Child, is signed by Pacheco.

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