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Tomás de Sosa

(New Spain (Mexico), c. 1655 – c. 1723)

*Saint Anthony of Padua
and the Miracle of the Mule*

oil on canvas

205 x 120.5 cm.; 80 3/4 x 47 1/2 in.

Provenance

Private Collection, Madrid.

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Works from New Spain — which circulated either for commercial reasons, as donations or as purchases intended for the decoration of houses in European and American territory — have been identified in various holdings, as well as in public and private collections.¹ In some cases, works coming from New Spain are easier to identify due to the use of American techniques such as conch, feather art or sculpture.² Goldsmith work was also conducted, particularly by immigrants from the Canary Islands who donated these pieces to their temples of origin.³ As for paintings, there are specific recurring themes, such as historical subjects on the Conquest, the *castas* paintings, or the devotion to the Virgin of Guadalupe. In the Canary Islands, even some works bearing the signatures of the painters Antonio Sánchez and José de Páez have been identified.⁴ Signed works by Antonio de Torres have also been located in the convent of the Incarnation of Granada.⁵

Little by little, the number of links between collectors and the academic milieu is increasing, which is why convents are opening their doors to the public so that their objects of devotion can be discovered and their art works properly analysed. For the same reason, owners are allowing access into their private residences. This is the case with the unique discovery of a signed painting by the artist Tomás de Sosa, located in Spain, which has been part of a family collection at least since the second half of the 19th century, although specific details about its acquisition are unknown. The owner was kind enough to be interested in learning more about the painter: he located the article, published eight years ago, that presents a compilation of archival documentation, as well as the artist's signed painting production, among which only three works were known to be in Mexican territory: the *Virgin of Guadalupe with Saint Joachim and Saint Anne* in the Chapel of Saint Simon and Saint Judas Tadeo, Azcapotzalco, Mexico City, *Holy Jesuits and Civil Portraits* at the National Museum of Art (MUNAL) and the *Lactation of Saint Bernard* in the Cathedral of Cuernavaca, Morelos (figs. 1-3). Therefore, the existence of another painting by Sosa in foreign lands, depicting *Saint Anthony of Padua and the Mule*, enriches our knowledge of Sosa's artistic work.

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On the basis of his known works, Tomás de Sosa was active between approximately 1655 and 1712—further study will continue to refine this period. He identified himself as a free mixed race painter, so it is natural that he acquired, together with his sister Juana de Sosa in 1697, his own house of stone and adobe in the neighborhood of San Sebastián.⁶ Thanks to the discovery of the Miracle of the Mule, it is now known that Sosa was still an active painter in 1723, as this canvas was signed and dated by the artist that year.

Presence of mixed race painters in the Spanish empire

The number of accounts of non-white painters is slowly increasing.⁷ Among the best known is Sebastián Gómez, “el Mulato de Murillo” (1616 – 1678), under the shelter of Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, who stood out for his “good taste in colour, a lot of impasto in his canvases and a fair amount of accuracy in his drawing”.⁸ For his part, Diego Velázquez was in charge of the Moorish slave Juan de Pareja, who was responsible for grinding the colours and preparing the canvases.

Regarding Latin America, studies have recently been published such as the one dedicated to José Gil de Castro, known as “el mulato Gil”, and José Bernardo, both Peruvian mixed race teachers living in Chile, active in the 19th century.⁹ Also, the painter José Campeche y Jordán gives an account of his Afro-Puerto Rican identity during the 18th century.¹⁰ In Cuba, Vicente Escobar de Flores (1762 – 1804), a Havana-born painter who specialized in portraiture, is also known.¹¹ In the case of Mexico, only three painters have been identified as masters, Juan Correa (active 1667 – 1716), whose work has been studied exceptionally,¹² as well as Juan de Cardona in 1670 and Tomás de Sosa in 1704¹³ and 1705.¹⁴

The presence of descendants of enslaved Africans in New Hispanic painting is rare, except of course in the series of *castas* where they have an obvious function to show physical features, gestures or attitudes in settings that reflect stereotypes of daily life, union activities

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or as part of the domestic service. In this sense, Tomás de Sosa incorporates elements allusive to the great diversity of New Spain. It should be remembered that he was a contemporary of Juan Correa, who incorporated children and angels that Elisa Vargas Lugo identified as “broken in colour”; that is, they show skin with “various shades of medium brown, although on some occasions it is frankly dark, no doubt wanting to record the various skin tones of the mulattoes [...] whose merit is not in their beauty but in representing a new face in New Spain.” These figures could possibly be identified as his grandchildren. Of the three works, there is one entitled *Jesuit Saints and Civil Portraits* in the collection of the National Museum of Art (MUNAL): a group scene where the composition focuses on Saint Ignatius of Loyola, and to his side Saint Francis of Borja, Saint Louis Gonzaga, Saint Francis Xavier and Saint Stanislaus of Kotska (fig. 3). Among the sixteen faces that Sosa depicted, one young man is clearly depicted with dark skin (fig. 4). In the same way, the skin colour of the angels and the baby Jesus in *The Lactation of Saint Bernard* is notable for its dark complexion (fig. 5). Additionally, in the current work of *Saint Anthony*, the presence of some figures with darker skin is noticeable.

Tomás de Sosa's version of Saint Anthony of Padua and the mule

The canvas represents the well-known prodigious event in the life of Saint Anthony of Padua: the miracle of the mule kneeling before the saint. This passage has been represented since the 15th century. For example, between 1446 – 1450, Donatello made four bronze reliefs for an altar in the Basilica of Saint Anthony, one of which depicts this moment. Similarly, the Flemish Anthony van Dyck (1599 – 1641) painted his own version of the subject in 1627.¹⁶ The event is described in different texts on the Franciscan saint, one of them is the *Life and miracles of the glorious Saint Anthony of Padua* by Fray Miguel Mestre, published in 1688. According to the author, in Tolosa there lived a heretic and “very famous dogmatizer”, named Gualdo, who was “very intelligent in the Hebrew language and fiery and daring in disputes”. The heretic had a public discussion with the Franciscan saint. Gualdo spoke, “and with vain ostentation of the misused studies of him, he speechified for a long

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time." Saint Anthony listened patiently to his adversary and later "took his hand and refuted his errors with sacred letters." The heretic could not refute the Franciscan's arguments, therefore, he "appealed to miracles." In other words, Guialdo demanded to be the witness to a miraculous event. He even said that he wanted to see a miracle that would demonstrate the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, describing precisely the miracles he wanted to see: "I will lock up my mule for three days, without giving him food or drink for all this time, and then at the place you would like to have that host, I will bring the mule hungry, and I will put food next to it, and if I see that, ignoring it, it instead makes a reverence and gift to the host that you say is consecrated, I will believe that it is the infallible truth Christ really and truly is in that host."²¹

Finally, Saint Anthony accepted the challenge, so having arrived on the agreed day, he celebrated the mass and went out in procession with the host in his hands, going to the place where the mule was. When they arrived, they put food in front of the mule. But the Franciscan said to the animal: "by virtue, and in the name of Jesus Christ, which I unduly hold in my hands, I am sending you an irrational creature that comes to revere and adore your breeder."²² It was then that the prodigy, represented in this painting by Tomás de Sosa, occurred: "Rare prodigy! Scarcely had Antonio pronounced these words properly, when the brute, despising the food, ignoring the urges with which his master invited her and instigated her natural appetite, came to the saint and prostrated on his knees, with astonishment and admiration of all those around, reverently worshiped the sacramented Christ". The portent not only converted Guialdo, but also motivated him to build a temple dedicated to the apostle Saint Peter, commissioning a sculpture of the prodigy on the lintel of the door. Of course, there are several pictorial versions of this event, one of them is that of Joseph Heintz the Younger (c. 1600 – 1678), a work located in the Basilica of John and Paul in Venice, Italy, where the setting is urban, unlike the in the engraving by Fray Miguel Mestre, which is rural. This detail is crucial since the version of Tomás de Sosa is linked to this tradition of the city.²⁴

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In the painting by Tomás de Sosa we see the moment in which the mule has prostrated before the Eucharist, which is why Saint Anthony holds in his hands the sacred host. Between the mule and the saint there is a bucket with water, which has been despised by said animal. Likewise, there is a male figure who carries in his hands a plate that apparently contains seeds, which has also been rejected. In addition, there are various figures on the scene, such as Guialdo himself, who has put his hand to his chest, thus expressing amazement and repentance; four friars holding a canopy — one of whom carries a lit candle — as well as some lay people who witness the miracle. The signature of Tomás de Sosa, located in a very specific part of the canvas, that is, very close to the main figure, at the feet of Saint Anthony, and executed with thin brushstrokes, reads: *Tomás de Sosa fecit. Año de 1723.*

It is worth mentioning that there is another composition that is very similar to Sosa's painting. In the Franciscan temple of Ozumba, State of Mexico, an altarpiece dedicated to Saint Anthony of Padua is preserved (fig. 9). This altarpiece has three canvases that were executed by the mulatto painter Juan Correa, an artist who died on November 3, 1716.²⁵ The canvas, which bears the artist's signature, is the one located in the upper part.²⁶ In this canvas the mulatto painter also represented the miracle of the mule. The similarities between the painting by Tomás de Sosa and the one executed by Correa are evident, although some differences can still be noted. As in Sosa's painting, the canopy is carried by the religious Order of Friars Minor. In Correa's painting, Guialdo's leading role is greater, who stretches out his arms in amazement at the wonder. The number of civic figures in the painting in the Franciscan church is smaller, reduced to only the heretic himself and a male figure behind him (fig. 10).²⁷

While the differences are remarkable, the similarities call for an explanation. One could be the possible use of a print, perhaps first by Juan Correa and later by Tomás de Sosa. It should be mentioned that, for a long time, one of the authors of the present article has dedicated himself to looking for the engraved source that Correa may have used to paint the

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three canvases of the altarpiece of San Antonio de Padua de Ozumba. Unfortunately, such research has so far been unsuccessful.

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Figure 1. Tomás de Sosa. *The Lactation of Saint Bernard*. Catedral de Cuernavaca. Mexico, c. 1680 – c. 1723. Reproduction from Centro Regional INAH-Morelos

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Figure 2. *Virgin of Guadalupe with Saint Joachim and Saint Anne.* Capilla de san Simón y san Judas Tadeo, Azcapotzalco

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Figure 3. Tomás de Sosa, *San Ignacio con un grupo de santos jesuitas*, oil on canvas, 223 x 300.5 cm. Museo Nacional de Arte

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Figure 4. Tomás de Sosa, Detail of a young boy's face with African features. Museo Nacional de Arte (MUNAL)



Figure 5. Tomás de Sosa, Detail of Baby Jesus, *The Lactation of Saint Bernard*. Cathedral of Cuernavaca, Mexico. Reproduction from Gabriela Sánchez Reyes

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Figure 6. Fray Miguel Mestre, *Vida y milagros del glorioso San Antonio de Padua* (1688). Edition of 1791

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Figure 7. Joseph Heintz el joven. *Saint Anthony of Padua and the Mule*. Basilica of Juan y Pablo en Venecia, Italia

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Figure 8. Tomás de Sosa, *San Antonio de Padua y la mula*. Private Collection

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Figure 9. Altar piece of Saint Anthony de Padua (paintings from before 3 November 1716).
Church of the Immaculate Conception, Ozumba, Mexico

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Figure 10. Juan Correa, *Saint Anthony of Padua and the Mule*. Church of the Immaculate Conception, Ozumba, Mexico

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Figure 11. Tomás de Sosa, (detail), *The Prodigy of Saint Anthony and the Mule*

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Footnotes (in Spanish)

¹ *México en el mundo de las colecciones de arte. Nueva España 1 y 2*, María Luisa Sabau García, UCOL, 1994.

² Pablo F. Amador Marrero, "De Oaxaca a Canarias: devociones y "traiciones" en *Anales Del Instituto De Investigaciones Estéticas*, Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, UNAM, Vol. XXXIV, NÚM. 101,

³ Cristina Esteras Martín, "Orfebrería poblana en la parroquia extremeña de Salvatierra de los Barros", *Revista de Indias*, núms. 163-164, 1981, pp. 269-279. Jesús Pérez Morera, *Arte, devoción y fortuna. Platería americana en las Canarias occidentales: "Exconvento de Santo Domingo (San Cristóbal de La Laguna)"*, 17 de diciembre de 2010-27 de febrero de 2011, Gobierno de Canarias, Viceconsejería de Cultura y Deportes, 2010.

⁴ Pablo F. Amador Marrero, "Dos cobres del pintor novohispano Antonio Sánchez en Canarias" en *Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas*, N.º. 88, 2006, págs. 205-212. Carlos Rodríguez Morales, "Nueva pintura de José de Páez en las Islas Canarias" en *Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas*, Volumen XXX, número 92, año 2008, pp. 223-227. Martínez de la Peña, Domingo, "Pinturas mejicanas del siglo XVIII" en *Tenerife en Anuario de estudios atlánticos*, Número 23, Madrid; Las Palmas, Cabildo Insular de Gran Canaria, 1977.

⁵ Lázaro Gila Medina, "Aproximación a la vida y obra del pintor novohispano Antonio de Torres (1667-1731) y estudio de una serie inédita mariana del convento de la Encarnación de Granada de franciscanas clarisas" en *Anales del Museo de América XXIII (2015)* Págs. 82-113.

⁶ Gabriela Sánchez Reyes, "El gremio de pintores y los mulatos: el caso del pintor Tomás de Sosa. 1680 ca.-1712 ca., en *Boletín de Monumentos Históricos*, Tercera Época, Núm. 13, mayo-agosto, México, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2008, pp. 4-16.

⁷ En fechas recientes se han publicado estudios sobre la presencia de mulatos en otros gremios, sin embargo, aquí únicamente nos centraremos en los pintores. *Cfr.* Yunuen Lizu Maldonado Dorantes, *Victorino Sánchez: un escultor mulato en la cañada oaxaqueña*, México, Tesis para obtener el grado de Licenciada en Historia, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2008. Moisés Guzmán Pérez, Los Durán, "Una familia de arquitectos mulatos de Valladolid. Siglos XVII-XVIII" en María Guadalupe Chávez Carbajal (coordinadora), *El rostro colectivo de la Nación Mexicana, Encuentros 1*, Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo, Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas, 1997, pp. 235-252.

⁸ Juan Agustín Cean Bermúdez, *Diccionario histórico de los más ilustres profesores de las bellas en España*, tomo segundo, D=J, Real Academia de san Fernando, Viuda de Ibarra, 1800, p. 204.

Pérez Sánchez, Alfonso E., *Pintura barroca en España 1600-1750*. Madrid, Ediciones Cátedra, 1992

⁹ Federico Eisner Sagüés, "Josephus Gil y José Bernardo Dos maestros mulatos peruanos en Chile" en *Estudios Avanzados*, Universidad de Santiago de Chile, núm. 24, 2015. Consultado el 19 de septiembre de 2018. <http://www.redalyc.org/jatsRepo/4355/435543383008/html/index.html>.

¹⁰ María Elba Torres Muñoz, "Resistencia y desafío de un pintor mulato en el siglo XVIII: Mar en la pintura de Campeche" (7 de noviembre de 2011), *Cruce, crítica socio-cultural contemporánea*, Escuela de Ciencias Sociales, Humanidades y Comunicaciones, Universidad Metropolitana. Consultado el 19 de septiembre de 2018: <http://revistacruce.com/artes/item/1932-resistencia-y-desafio-de-un-pintor-mulato-en-el-siglo-xviii>.

María Elba Torres Muñoz, "Resistencia y desafío de un pintor mulato en el siglo XVIII: Tierra en la pintura de Campeche" (14 de noviembre de 2011), *Cruce, crítica socio-cultural contemporánea*, Escuela de Ciencias Sociales, Humanidades y Comunicaciones, Universidad Metropolitana. Consultado el 19 de septiembre de 2018: <http://revistacruce.com/artes/item/1933-resistencia-y-desafio-de-un-pintor-mulato-en-el-siglo-xviii-tierra-en-la-pintura-de-campeche>.

María Elba Torres Muñoz, "Resistencia y desafío de un pintor mulato en el siglo XVIII: Aire en la pintura de Campeche" *Cruce, crítica socio-cultural contemporánea*, Escuela de Ciencias Sociales, Humanidades y Comunicaciones, Universidad Metropolitana. Consultado <http://revistacruce.com/artes/item/1931-resistencia-y-desafio-de-un-pintor-mulato-en-el-siglo-xviii-aire>.

¹¹ Archivo General de Indias, Galería de retratos de los Gobernadores y Capitanes Generales de Cuba (1771-1893), Retrato de Felipe Fonsdeviela, marqués de la Torre, ES.41091.AGI/22//RETRATOSGCG_CUBA,1.,

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RETRATOSGCG_CUBA,5,ES.41091.AGI/22//RETRATOSGCG_CUBA,3. Consuelo Naranjo Orovio *Historia de Cuba*, Conejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas. Ediciones Doce Calles, S.L., Volume 1, p. 461.

¹² Elisa Vargas Lugo de Bosch, *Juan Correa: su vida y su obra*, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1985, Volume 1; Volume 4, 1985.

¹³ Paula Mues Orts, *La libertad del pincel: los discursos sobre la nobleza de la pintura en Nueva España*, México, Universidad Iberoamericana, Departamento de Arte, 2008, p. 393.

¹⁴ Sánchez Reyes Gabriela, *Op.cit.*, p.

¹⁵ Elisa Vargas Lugo de Bosch, *et.al.*, *Juan Correa: su vida y su obra*, México, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1985, volumen IV, primera parte, pp. 41-42., 55-60.

¹⁶ Louis Réau, *Iconografía del arte cristiano. De la A a la F*, Ediciones del Serbal, España, 1997, tomo 2, vol. 3, p. 129. El Museo de Prado cuenta con otra versión del tema. *Cfr.* Museo Nacional del Prado, Conferencia: El milagro de san Antonio de Padua, impartida por José Juan Pérez Preciado el 5 de noviembre de 2017. Consultado el 23 de agosto de 2018.

¹⁷ Miguel Mestre, *Vida y milagros del glorioso San Antonio de Padua. Sol brillante de la Iglesia, lustre de la Religión Seráfica, Gloria de Portugal, Honor de España, Tesoro de Italia, Terror del Infierno, Martillo perpetuo de la herejía, entre los Santos por Excelencia el Milagrero*, Barcelona, Martin Gelabert, 1688, p. 45.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 45.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 45.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 46.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 46.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 47.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 47.

²⁴ <https://www.wga.hu/index1.html>

²⁵ Elisa Vargaslugo, "Juan Correa", en *El arte en tiempos de Juan Correa. Memoria del coloquio*, coord. María del Consuelo Maquívar, México, INAH, 1994, p. 175.

²⁶ Cabe señalar que las telas del retablo de San Antonio de Padua no fueron incluidas en el último tomo recientemente publicado dedicado a Juan Correa, de ahí la relevancia de dar a conocer este retablo que además tiene relación con Tomás de Sosa. *Cfr.* Elisa Vargaslugo, *Juan Correa. Su vida y su obra*, t I, México, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México-Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, 2017.

²⁷ Por supuesto, al tratarse de uno de los milagros más afamados de San Antonio de Padua, los pintores novohispanos recrearon aquella escena en sus obras. Entre ellas se puede mencionar, por ejemplo, una pintura en un retablo lateral en el templo de Santo Tomás en Ixtlán de Juárez, el cual está dedicado al santo franciscano, o bien una pintura que forma parte del acervo del Museo Nacional del Virreinato la cual muestra alrededor del santo distintos hechos prodigiosos de su vida, entre ellos el *Milagro de la mula*. Sin embargo, ninguna de ellas es tan semejante. Por ejemplo, en ninguna de las versiones mencionadas se observa a frailes franciscanos sosteniendo el palio.