

# COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



Juan José Rosales  
(Guatemala city c. 1751 – 1816)

*Portrait of Doña María Josefa  
Romana y Manrique*

oil on canvas

inscribed (lower left): V. R. DE D<sup>A</sup>  
MARÍA JOSEFA ROMANA Y  
MANRIQUE NACIO EN LA CIUDAD  
DE GUAT<sup>A</sup> EN 26 DE EN<sup>O</sup> DE 1769,  
CASÓ CON D. JUAN PAYÉS Y FONT  
EN 24 DE OCT<sup>E</sup>. 1787

198 x 149 cm.; 78 x 58.2 in.

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## Provenance

Private Collection, United States.

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V R DE D<sup>a</sup>  
MARIA JOSEFA  
ROMANAY MAN  
RIQUE NACIO EN  
LA CIUDAD DE  
GUAT<sup>a</sup> EN 26 DE  
EN<sup>o</sup> B 1769  
CASO CON DJUAN  
PAYES Y FONT  
EN 24 DE OCT  
1781

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LONDON

NEW YORK

MADRID

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Not much information has come down to us about the life of Juan José Rosales, a Criollo painter and engraver nicknamed *El Místico* (Mystic), other than that he lived in Guatemala City for at least the period 1751-1816.<sup>1</sup> In 1783 he married Doña Ángela Josefa Alfaro, with whom he had four children: Víctor, José María, Gregorio and Nazario. Years later, in 1795, he became a member of the recently-inaugurated *Sociedad Económica de Amigos del País* (Economic Society of Friends of the Country), an institution given over to promoting the arts, science and agriculture, where Rosales came into contact with the doctrine of liberal and enlightened thought, and where his brush was able to pick up a level of erudition in short supply in the Guatemalan school of the time, with its dramatic rather than scholarly tendencies. This attempt to inject reason into art was well received by contemporary artists, to the extent that Rosales was considered the “*head of our school and father of Guatemalan painting*”. It is said that he was “*the most prolific painter in the country*”,<sup>2</sup> leaving behind a major corpus including a wide diversity of works ranging from religious painting, the main subject area in the context of the Counter Reformation, to portraiture, the pictorial field to which the work we are addressing here belongs, and which includes the most important works to have come from his hand. (fig. 1).

Before embarking on the study and analysis of the portrait of Doña María Josefa, I would like to sketch a brief picture of Rosales in his capacity as official portraitist of the leading Guatemalan social classes. Firstly, we should highlight his position as portrait artist to the most eminent political figures in the Viceroyalty, including his work depicting Don Pedro de Alvarado, *Adelantado* (military governor) of Guatemala, painted in 1808. There are also documentary records referring to Rosales having executed a number of other portraits, one, dated 1812, of Judge Antonio Norberto Serrano Polo, from the Museo de Arte Colonial, and various works portraying Charles IV, one for the Fortress of St. Fernando de Omoa in Honduras, painted in 1790, and another, dated 1797 for the aforementioned Economic Society, along with two further full-length works for Guatemala City Council, painted in 1789. In addition, in 1808 Rosales painted a portrait of Ferdinand VII, using engravings by Rico and Brunetti based on a drawing by Antonio Carnicero as his model.<sup>3</sup>

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A second group of portraits is made up of those depicting members of the clergy, also keen to leave visual testimony of their role in the developing life of the nation. As is the case with many other cathedrals throughout New Spain, the chapter house of the Catedral Metropolitana del Apóstol Santiago in Guatemala boasts a complete iconographic series of portraits of bishops and archbishops, some of these coming from the palette of Rosales, whose innovative style, generous in terms of light and joyful color, marked a break with the tenebrism of Baroque portraiture popular up until then, and suggests the influence of the brush of José de Páez.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, and as a third category of portraits, this being in my opinion the most attractive group from a compositional point of view, we have the works Rosales dedicated to civil portraiture, and to which the beautiful canvas we have before us here belongs. To speak about civil portraiture in the Viceroyalty in the 18th century does, in fact, mean speaking about the portraits of Criollos or the newly-arrived Spanish. This new generation, distant descendants of the first conquistadors, did not have much in common with those men and women of action. The new Criollo elite, urbane and stable, often cultured, sometimes extravagant, both aware and proud of their status and power, experienced the temptation to make show of their recently-attained social standing and, to that end, one of the fundamental elements was portraiture, through which, and via the codification of differentiating elements appertaining to social rank, they communicated their privileged status to the rest of the settlers in the Americas.

The economic expansion of the Criollo population, made up of landowners, a newly-born bourgeoisie and a few, select members of the local aristocracy, also brought with it a housing expansion, with historical neighborhoods filling up with ostentatious mansions and palaces needing no less ostentatious portraits, the execution of which meant the social rise and prestige of painters such as Juan José Rosales, “*the pictorial chronicler of the Guatemalan elite*”.

One additional attraction to studying civil portraiture from the 18th century onwards is the fact that the subjects depicted expanded, in a generalized fashion and within the limitations

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imposed by class, to include women and, with them, a new repertoire of decorative attributes and elements that are particularly interesting for art lovers, such as dress and jewelry.

What scant bibliographic literature there is dealing with Rosales has made the mistake of ascribing neoclassical attributes to him when the predominance of line and form over color, the clear conditioning of the artist to a specific and decisive set of rules, as well as his apparent dependence on recognizable printed models, invites us to draw parallels between his style and the aesthetic requirements of the Madrid Court school from the late 18th century, and early 19th-century French academic art, both of which styles are evident in our portrait.

On this occasion, we see a depiction of Doña María Josefa Romana y Manrique, a Criollo lady born in Guatemala City on 26 January 1769, and who married Don Juan Payés y Font in the same city in October 1787, said husband featuring in the painting hanging on the right-hand wall of the room, with an oval frame and Baroque decoration.

The young lady, aged 22, appears standing up in the middle of the composition, almost in profile and full length. Dressed in all her finery, as called for by a moment immortalizing her over the centuries, she is wearing an elegant two-piece robe, largely in line with French-dominated 18th-century fashion. Her image, which expresses rigidity, dignity and gravity, is dominated by her outfit, concealing her figure thanks to the hoop skirt hidden under the two-piece outer skirt, opening out into a V-shape at the front which reveals her petticoat, just as rigid and ornate, with the same elegant and perfectly designed fabric as the rest of Doña Josefa's attire. Her torso also has an opening at the front, which appears to be padded out with a *stomacher*,<sup>5</sup> shaped like a shield and stiffened with card or whalebone. The sleeves of the robe are typical of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, reaching down to a little above the elbows, and just loose enough for the lace frills of her undershirt to stick out, also covering part of her forearms, and thereby meeting the demands of modesty with regards bare flesh. The frill's fabric and decorous function are shared by the shawl worn over Doña Josefa's shoulders, which is secured in the middle of her breast, concealing the latter and revealing, in its place, a brooch featuring large white, red and blue flowers. Her face, which is young and impassive, is a closed book in terms of expression, as was *de rigueur* for the purposes of the canvas. Standing out

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against her snow-white skin we observe two fine eyebrows, slightly raised, and meeting her nose in the middle, which is thin and elongated. Her small, almond-shaped eyes look fixedly towards the left of the composition.

Finally her mouth, which is small, thin and resolutely closed. Her hair is embellished with a vertically-arranged wig and a headdress of feathers and gemstones. Our eye is drawn to the delicate act of rebellion in the timid emergence of the tip of her left shoe which, just visible under a robe of the required length, presages the rising hemlines of the decades to come. Equally important in terms of connotations is the fact that the subject should have chosen to sit for her portrait dressed in her finest jewels. Bracelets, rings, an imposing necklace with matching earrings tell the spectator, particularly the contemporary spectator, that we are witness to one of the most powerful women in Guatemala. Reinforcing this message is the fan she is holding in her left hand, so popular in viceregal depictions of Criollo women, forced to use a brand new one on each occasion.

As with other subjects from Rosales' oeuvre (fig. 2), María Josefa is pictured in one of the rooms from her home. On her right we see a Rococo style table on which there is a silver writing set with inkstand, quill holder and tray. Doña Josefa is pictured resting her right hand on the table, in which she is holding a card.

The cartouche is located in the lower left-hand corner, inside an oval frame with volute molding, and where the inscription reads: "*V. R. DE D<sup>A</sup> MARÍA JOSEFA ROMANA Y MANRIQUE NACIO EN LA CIUDAD DE GUAT<sup>A</sup> EN 26 DE EN<sup>O</sup> DE 1769, CASÓ CON D. JUAN PAYÉS Y FONT EN 24 DE OCT<sup>E</sup> 1787*". Under that, in italics and painted in black, we read the words: *Juan Joseph Rosales fecit año de 1791.*

Diametrically opposite the cartouche, in the upper right-hand corner of the canvas, we see the coats of arms of the Romana family (on the left) and the Manrique family (on the right). Both appear on top of an imposing curtain of red fabric, tied back with a cord with pompoms of the same color, which is hanging on the right-hand side of the canvas, lending the scene a certain theatricality.

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Of particular interest in this painting is the device (quite common in Rosales) of meta-painting: the painting within the painting, which was rare though not inexistant in viceregal portraiture (fig. 3).<sup>6</sup> It is as such that Don Juan Payés y Font appears, also dressed in the French fashion, with dress-coat and waistcoat, tie and wig, in a Baroque style portrait in a frame with molding from the same stylistic period. Although the painting does adhere to the demands of line over color that dominated the academic style of late 18th-century courtly portraiture, and which artists such as Maella and Carnicero excelled at in Madrid, with their work reaching the New World through prints, it is hard not to be struck by the slight resistance to a complete abandonment of the nuances of the end of the Baroque period, present in the undulating lines and the earthy quality of the palette.

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**Figure 1.** Juan José Rosales, *Don Fermín de Aycinena e Irigoyen*, 18th century, oil on canvas. Private Collection



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**Figure 2.** Juan José Rosales, *Don Martín Serra Avellí*, 1790, oil on canvas. Palafreugell Town Council, Girona, Spain

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**Figure 3.** Anonymous, *Portrait of a Lady*, 18th century, oil on canvas. Private Collection

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## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> One of the first articles dedicated to the study of Guatemala's painting from the 18th century was published in 1966 by Luis Lujan Muñoz, which was included in *Revista USAC* under the title 'Las artes plásticas guatemaltecas a mediados del siglo XVIII y siglo XIX'. His work was continued by Dr. Juan Haroldo Rodas Estrada, who has published the only information known about the painter Juan José Rosales (see J. H. Rodas Estrada, 'Pintores del periodo hispánico en Guatemala', in *Revista de Antropología, Arqueología e Historia*, no. 2, 1996; and J. H. Rodas Estrada, *Pintura y escultura hispánica en Guatemala*, Guatemala 1992).

<sup>2</sup> See the biography in F. Rojas, *Histórico Biográfico de Guatemala*, Guatemala 2004, p. 803.

<sup>3</sup> For further information about the influence of prints on Guatemala's painting, see R. Toledo Palomo, 'Aportaciones del grabado europeo al arte de Guatemala', in *Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas*, no. 35, Mexico 1996.

<sup>4</sup> A large number of the works held in churches and museums in Guatemala were created by Mexican artists, among which a few names stand out: Cristóbal de Villalpando, who painted the series on the life of Saint Francis currently in the Museo Colonial de Antigua; Juan Correa, whose work can be found in the city's cathedral; and Miguel Cabrera, painter of the portrait of Hermano Pedro which now belongs to the Collection Popenoe. For further information about the influence of Mexican artists on Guatemalan painting, see J. Mobil, *Historia del Arte Guatemalteco*, Guatemala 1988, p. 273 and M. Monforte, *Las formas y los días. El Barroco en Guatemala*, Guatemala 1989, p. 149.

<sup>5</sup> J. Laver, *Breve historia del traje y la moda*, Madrid 2017, p. 116.

<sup>6</sup> It is not the first time that the Guatemalan artist uses the "painting-within-a-painting" technique. This can also be seen in *Portrait of Doña Rafaela Labayru Azagra y Pineda*, which belongs to the Collection Popenoe (included in the author's master's thesis *José Rosales (ca. 1751-1816) y el retrato civil. Nuevas aportaciones al estudio y catálogo del pintor guatemalteco*). An interesting publication on the use of this type of composition is J. Portús Pérez, *Metapintura: un viaje a la idea del arte en España*, Madrid 2016.