

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



Miguel González

(Mexico, active second half of 17th century)

Infant Jesus and Infant John the Baptist

oil on mother-of-pearl on wooden panel

signed: *Miguel Gonzal*

inscription on the cartouche: *AGNUS ADEST AGNIS*

21.5 x 28 cm.; 8.4 x 11 in.

Provenance

Private Collection, London.

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Miguel González, “*skilled in said art of painting*” and undeniably a benchmark figure in the “enconchado” mother-of-pearl technique, was born in 1662 to a family of artists. His father, Tomás González de Villaverde, “*master of ‘maque’ painting*”, had his own workshop in Mexico City where, in all likelihood, Miguel would have received his first commissions.

Not much else is known about this master artist, although a considerable number of his works have survived to this day, bearing witness to Miguel as an original creator and eminent figure, along with another artist from the family, Juan, in this unusual artform of a uniquely New Spanish variety.

The work we have before us here, probably a private commission to judge by the exceptional quality of its iconography, should be dated to towards the end of the 17th century, given “*the works signed by Miguel González relate to 1692-98*”. The image, with its undeniable debt to Murillo, probably based on one of the prints reproducing this scene from Christ’s childhood (one of the Seville painter’s creative specialties) (fig. 1), is a showcase of skill and virtuosity, luminosity and sweetness which, clearly seen in the drawing of the faces and in the masterful inlay work, tell us this is a González, “*unique in specializing in these kinds of paintings*”.

The scene, with its anecdotal ambience, in the style of genre painting, is presided over by the two main protagonists. The Infant Jesus, chubby and full of vitality, is located on the left of the composition. With his sweet expression and downward-tilting head, chubby blushing cheeks and long, wavy auburn hair, he is seen wearing an off-white robe, made up of big pieces of mother-of-pearl, arranged regularly, and on top of which one can discern a thin coat of paint that heightens the brilliant sheen of this organic/inorganic material with total freedom. Standing opposite him is the Infant John the Baptist, accompanied by a mother-of-pearl lamb, one of the latter’s key iconographic attributes. The cousin of Christ, equally chubby and in good health, is pictured wearing a reddish loincloth, also made up of pieces of mother-of-pearl on top of which a coat of color has subsequently been applied, helping to lend the composition its intended iridescence. The landscape opens out behind him, with a reduced color palette, in a sort of interplay of washed-out tones of ochre, and which enters into contact and contrast with the execution of the trees, located slightly more to the foreground and closer to the viewer,

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impacting on the scene's sense of space. The trees, mostly to the left of the visual narrative, rise up in a combination of brown brushstrokes and subtle mother-of-pearl inlay.

Finally, it is worth drawing attention to the vibrant and colorful decoration running along the edges which, acting as a frame within the painting, is a peerless display of skill, reminding us of the masterful technique and aesthetic originality to be found in the oeuvre of Miguel González (figs. 2 and 3). This compositional element, subject of the almost exclusive attention of the artist and, I fear, the spectator, too, is made up of an ordered succession of pieces of mother-of-pearl on which, with gilt edging, a decorative border arranged symmetrically has been drawn, and whose point of reference is the lower cartouche on which we can read the words: "*Agnus Adest Agnis*". As such, this undeniably Baroque-inspired decoration is made up of acanthus leaves, phytomorphic motifs, volutes and a pair of cherubim presiding over the upper corners.

In this marvelous work, the artist has showcased his superlative skills in both composition and technique, creating a scene of surprising sweetness in which the figures appear to pose joyfully for the delight of the viewer.

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Figure 1. Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, *Infant Jesus and Infant John the Baptist*, oil on canvas, 17th century, Colección F. Bonilla-Musoles, Valencia

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Figure 2. Miguel González, *Our Lady of Guadalupe*, oil and mother-of-pearl on wooden panel, 17th century, Los Angeles County Museum of Art

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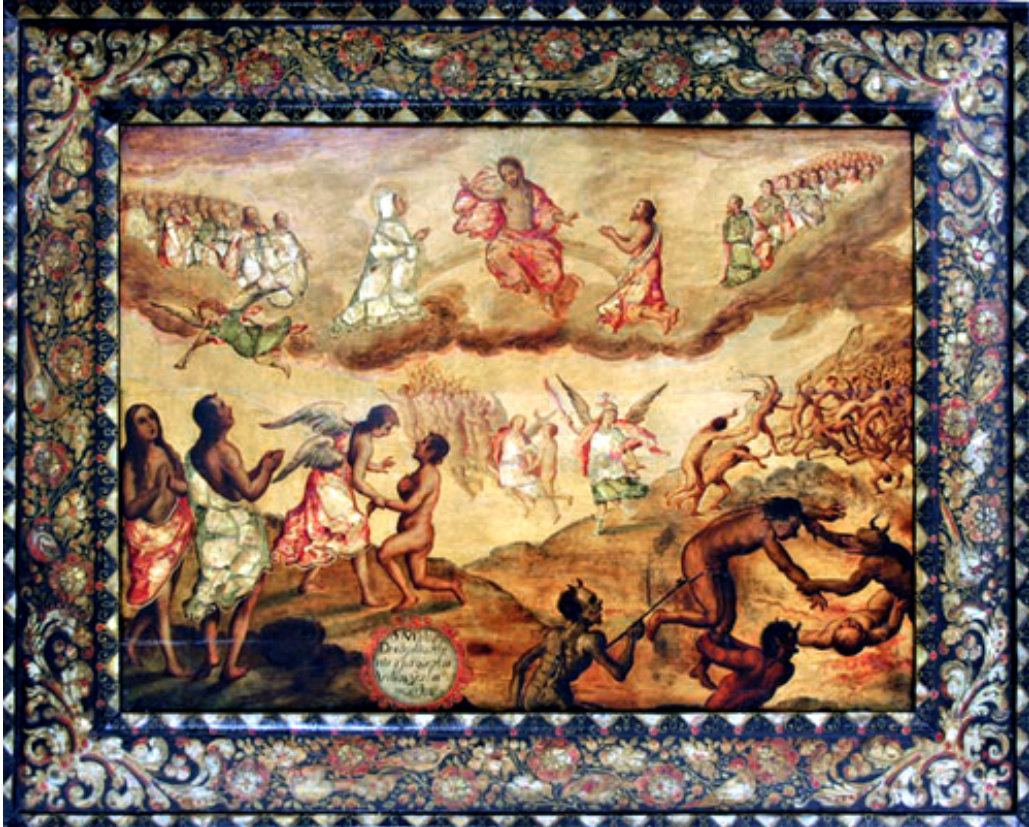


Figure 3. Miguel González, Last Judgment, oil and mother-of-pearl on wooden panel, 17th century, Museo Nacional del Virreinato, Tepotzotlán