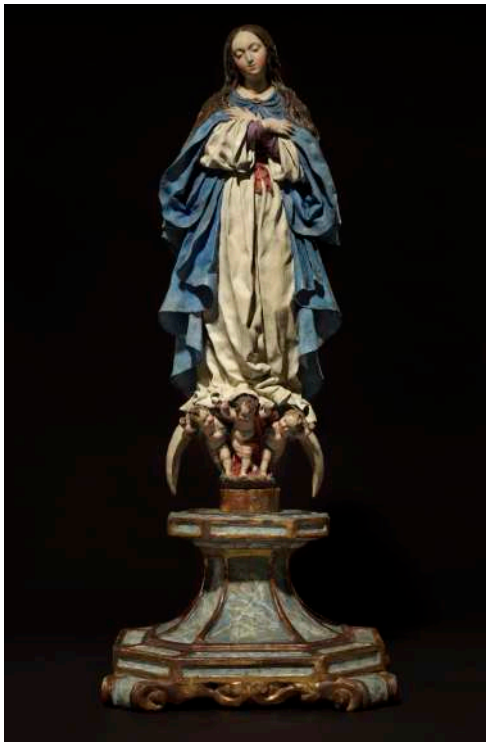
COLNAGHI



LUISA ROLDÁN, called ROLDANA
(Seville 1652-1706 Madrid)

VIRGIN OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION, 1690–1706
Polychromed terracotta
52 x 21 x 12.5 cm

Provenance

Private collection;
With Coll and Cortés, 2016;
Private collection, Austria.

Literature

Luisa Roldán: Court Sculptor to the Kings of Spain. Madrid: Coll & Cortes 2016, pp. 46, 48, reproduced p. 53, fig 36.

Hall van den Elsen, Catherine. 2018. *Fuerza e intimismo: Luisa Roldán, escultora (1652-1706).* Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas 2018, pp. 148-49.

Related literature

Alcazar, Luis de. 1614. *Rev. Patris Ludovici ab Alcasar, Hispalensis e Societate Jesu Theologi, & in provincia bætica sacræ scripturæ professoris, Vestigatio arcani sensus in Apocalypsi.* Antwerp: apud Joannem Keerbergium : typis Gerardi Wolschati, & Henrici Ærtsi.

Pacheco, Francisco de. 1649. *Arte de la pintura. Su antiguedad y grandezas*. Seville: Simón Fajardo.

Heredia Barnuevo, Diego Nicolás de. 1741. *Mystico ramillete histórico, chronológico panegirico*. Granada: Imprenta Real.

Valdenebro y Cisneros, José M. de. 1889. *Justa poética celebrada en la Parroquia de San Andrés de Córdoba el dia 15 de Enero de 1617*. Seville: C. de Torres.

Howe, Elizabeth Teresa. 1986. “Lope de Vega and the Immaculate Conception.” *Bulletin of the Comediantes*, Volume 38, Number 1: 39-53.

Stratton, Suzanne L. 1994. *The Immaculate Conception in Spanish Art*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.

Ruano de la Haza, José María. 1996. “Historias de los textos dramáticos en el siglo de oro: Calderón, *Las órdenes militares* y la Inquisición” In *Actas del IV Congreso Internacional de la Asociación Internacional Siglo de Oro (AISO)*, María Cruz García de Enterría and Alicia Cordón Mesa (editors), 75–93. Alcalá de Henares: Universidad de Alcalá de Henares.

Vizuete Mendoza, J. Carlos. 2005. “Voto, juramento y fiesta de la Inmaculada en la Universidad de Toledo,” 327–60. In *La Inmaculada Concepción en España: religiosidad, historia y arte* t.1. San Lorenzo del Escorial, Publicaciones del Real Centro Universitario Escorial-María Cristina, Ediciones Escurialenses.

Domínguez Matito, Francisco. 2007. “Un auto sacramental en su contexto: El hereje de Álvaro Cubillo de Aragón.” *eHumanista*: 241-69.

Barrios Aguilera, Manuel. 2011. *La invención de los libros plúmbeos: Fraude, historia y mito*. Granada: Editorial Universidad de Granada.

Luisa Roldán Court Sculptor to the Kings of Spain. Madrid: Coll & Cortes, 2016.

Lenaghan, Patrick. 2016. “Luisa Roldán’s Career in Madrid: Intimate Masterpieces in Terracotta.” In *Luisa Roldán Court Sculptor to the Kings of Spain*, 20–41. Madrid: Coll & Cortes.

Domínguez Matito, Francisco. 2018. “Escenografía para La hidalga del valle: un auto a la sazón.” *Anuario Calderoniano*: 63–80.

Hall van den Elsen, Catherine. 2018. *Fuerza e intimismo: Luisa Roldán, escultora (1652-1706).* Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas.

Góngora, Luis de. 2019. *Sonetos*. Ed. Juan Matas Caballero. Madrid: Cátedra.

Lenaghan, Patrick. 2020. “Luisa Roldán’s *Virgin of Solitude (Virgen de la Soledad)*: Art and Religion in Madrid.” *Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts* 94: 55–73.

González Tornel, Pablo. 2021. *Ver es creer: la Inmaculada Concepción y España en el siglo XVII*. Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas.

Hall-van den Elsen, Catherine. 2024. *Gender and the Woman Artist in Early Modern Iberia*. New York and London: Routledge.

Lenaghan, Patrick. Forthcoming. “Caída y auge de Luisa Roldán en el mundo anglosajón.” In *Luisa Roldán. Escultora Real*. Valladolid: Museo Nacional de Escultura.

COLNAGHI

COLNAGHI

COLNAGHI

This splendid terracotta comes from the hand of Luisa Roldán (1652–1706), one of the most remarkable sculptors of Spain's *siglo de oro*. Born in Seville, she learned her craft from her father, Pedro Roldán, who ran a major workshop and executed important projects there. She subsequently embarked on an independent career in which she created figures for altarpieces, processional images, and small devotional groups. After beginning in her native city, she turned her attention to Cádiz carving major statues for the cathedral there (1684–87), before moving to Madrid in 1688 or 1689. In the capital, king Charles II granted her the title of Royal Sculptor, *Escultor de cámara*, an unprecedented achievement for a woman artist at the time.[1]

In this terracotta, Roldán portrays a favorite Spanish subject, the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception, the doctrine which affirms that Mary was conceived without original sin. She wears a white robe under a blue mantle onto which her hair falls. Holding her arms crossed over her chest, she stands, almost motionless, on a crescent moon which three putti support. These angelic creatures add a playful note as they turn and look at each other. With his upraised arms, the one in the middle causes the Virgin's robe to move in response to his gesture. The contrast between the energetic cherubim and the serene figure above them underscores Mary's rapt absorption, as if lost in prayer.

The *Immaculate Conception* not only shows Roldán's characteristic delicacy of touch, but it is her only known depiction of the subject. This stands out even more when one considers that she spent her career creating religious images exclusively. Although scholars have not established a date for the piece, it probably comes from her years in Madrid (1688/89–1706) when she turned to terracotta as a way to market her art.[2] In this medium, she expressed moments ranging from idyllic sweetness to religious ecstasy or bloody violence. Because previous authors often overlooked this variety, they frequently underestimated her achievement.[3] A sculpture such as this attests to the greater breadth of her career, while also revealing how she reworked subjects to offer her version of a recognized type.

When Roldán created the *Immaculate Conception*, the subject had an iconography which the clergy, the faithful, and artists all accepted.[4] The path by which they reached this consensus during the seventeenth century offers a glimpse into popular devotion and changing aesthetic preference. In the late fifteenth-century, many

[1] Hall-van den Elsen 2024 for biographies of comparable women artists.
[2] For surveys in English of her work in this period see Lenaghan 2016 and Hall-van den Elsen 2021.
[3] See Lenaghan forthcoming.
[4] For this history of this iconography see Stratton 1994 and González Tornel 2021.

selected the meeting of the Virgin's parents at the Golden Gate, the moment when the church taught that she was conceived without original sin. But over the course of the sixteenth century, it gradually lost ground to images which represented the Virgin more directly. In these, artists joined the Assumption of the Virgin (in which she ascends to heaven after her death) with the Woman who appears in the Book of Revelation, "clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars" (Revelations 12:1, fig. 1). Gradually, a type emerged which depicted her floating in heaven and accompanied with prescribed attributes. In his treatise, *Arte de la Pintura* (1649), Francisco Pacheco, Diego Velázquez's father-in-law and a painter in his own right, outlined this formula: a young girl of twelve or thirteen years with beautiful features, crowned with stars and standing on a crescent moon.[5]

From this point, Spanish sculptors would follow Pacheco's formula while recasting it within their style. Roldán could thus have seen many examples not just in her native Seville but throughout Andalucía. In Seville, Juan Martínez Montañés endowed the Virgin (Seville Cathedral, fig. 2) with a classicizing quality, idealized features, and voluminous draperies that largely obscure the body. This example prevailed until the next generation, led by Alonso Cano (Granada Cathedral, fig. 3), portrayed a younger girl with a slimmer figure while accentuating the draperies. Elsewhere in Andalucía, Pedro de Mena (Córdoba Cathedral, fig. 4) and José de Mora (Santos Justo y Pastor, Granada, fig. 5) put their own stamp on the subject later in the century.

Like these artists, Roldán renders the established type faithfully yet distinctively. She imbues the central figure with graceful elegance and youthful innocence, qualities that also appear in her nativity scenes (The Hispanic Society of America, fig. 6) or groups of the Virgin and Christ Child (Colnaghi). By depicting a younger woman than usual, she evokes Mary's serenity and purity. Unlike so many contemporary examples whose draperies billow out while she clasps her hands in prayer, Roldán's figure seems motionless as if transfixed, as she holds her arms across her chest. These features stand out more when one compares the terracotta to paintings by Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (Madrid Museo del Prado, Seville Cathedral Chapterroom, fig. 7). Although he portrays a young woman, he fills the scene with an almost ecstatic energy that contrasts vividly with Roldán's sculpture.

[5] Pacheco 1649, 481-84.

Although today some may find such differences overly subtle, a viewer at the time would almost certainly have noticed them given the strong devotion to the Immaculate Conception. While the doctrine found adherents throughout Spain in the fifteenth century, the intensity picked up in the seventeenth century when the energetic (and litigious) archbishop of Seville, Pedro de Castro Vaca y Quiñones (1534–1623, fig. 8), actively promoted the cause in his diocese and eventually persuaded Philip III to petition the papacy in favor of the doctrine.[6] As the king and his descendants, Philip IV and Charles II, increasingly identified themselves as Catholic monarchs defending the faith, they championed the Immaculate Conception, advocating that it be made official dogma. Nonetheless, successive popes were reluctant to do so since the belief had generated bitter controversy that began in the Middle Ages and only intensified during the Reformation. Bowing to Spanish pressure, pope Paul V issued bulls (1616 and 1617) affirming church teaching on the issue and forbidding anyone to question it publicly. His successor Gregory XV extended this five years later to include private discussions, and in 1661, Alexander VII recognized December 8 as the feast day of the Immaculate Conception and again banned all opposition.

Looking at Spanish religious and literary history, one sees how popular the belief was throughout society, particularly as major authors turned to the subject and different bodies celebrated the papal decrees. Luis de Góngora y Argote contributed a sonnet to a poetry contest dedicated to the belief in Córdoba on January 15, 1617.[7] On December 10, 1617, the University of Toledo swore publicly to uphold the doctrine.[8] In Salamanca, the professors at the University decided to take a similar oath (1618), which they afterwards with a public program that included a play written for the occasion by Lope de Vega, *La limpieza no manchada*.[9] If the work does not rank among his finest, another leading playwright, Pedro Calderón de la Barca turned to the subject to great effect when writing *autos sacramentales* (religious plays performed on Corpus Christi). In 1640, his *La hidalga del valle* appeared in Granada after an anonymous placard caused a public outcry when it appeared during the Easter season slandering the Virgin and the Catholic faith.[10] Performed a few months after that event, the *auto* answers these charges and defends the belief with Calderón's characteristic elegance. Although he frequently invoked the concept, the most remarkable such instance occurred towards the end of his life. When news

[6] Barrios Aguilera 2011, 107-32.
[7] Góngora 2019, 1125-29; Valdenebro y Cisneros 1889 publishes all the texts recited there.

[8] Vizuete Mendoza 2005.
[9] Howe 1986.
[10] Domínguez Matito 2007, 247-50; Domínguez Matito 2018, 73-74.

reached Spain of Alexander VII's Bull of 1661, splendid festivities occurred throughout the peninsula, such as those commemorated in Valencia. Calderón penned the *auto*, *Las órdenes militares* for performance in Madrid in 1662. Although he enjoyed royal favor and high esteem at court, three passages from the play landed him before the Inquisition which feared that he had misinterpreted the Bull as a statement of doctrine.[11] They also worried that parts of the text could lead to further debate, which was also prohibited. That Calderón had created such refined poetic conceits that then attracted a close reading from the censors shows how closely people studied the question.

In such a climate, the *Immaculate Conception* would have elicited powerful emotions from contemporary viewers. Rendering the subject exquisitely and distinctively, Roldán shows the Virgin lost in quiet prayer, while the playful cherubim below her evoke a heavenly setting and her virtue. In doing this, the sculptor creates her own interpretation of the subject so that even if few people today appreciate the fervent devotion that the artist and her contemporaries felt for this doctrine, we can all admire her splendid artistry.

Patrick Lenaghan
The Hispanic Society of America

[11] Ruano de la Haza 1996.

Fig. 1. Woman of the Apocalypse from Alcazar, Luis de. 1614. *Rev. Patris Ludovici ab Alcasar, Hispalensis e Societate Jesu Theologi, & in provincia bætica sacræ scripturæ professoris, Vestigatio arcani sensus in Apocalypsi.* Antwerp: apud Joannem Keerbergium : typis Gerardi Wolschati, & Henrici Ærtsi.

Fig. 2. Juan Martínez Montañés, *Immaculate Conception,* Seville Cathedral, 1629-31.

Fig. 3. Alonso Cano, *Immaculate Conception*, Granada Cathedral, 1655-56.

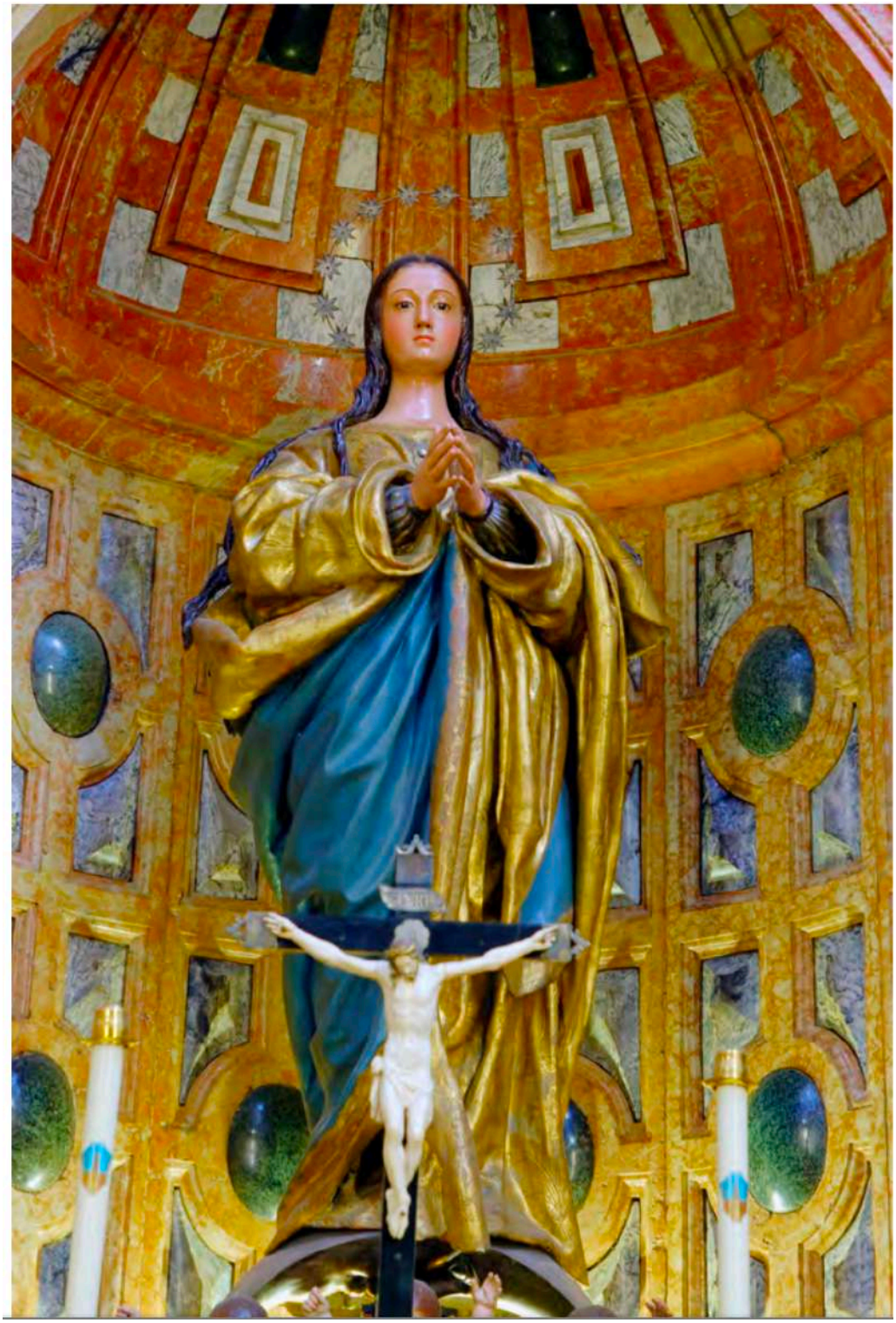


Fig. 4. Pedro de Mena, *Immaculate Conception*, Córdoba Cathedral, 1679.

Fig. 5. José de Mora, *Immaculate Conception*, Santos Justo y Pastor, Granada, 1671-74.

Fig. 6. Luisa Roldán, *Rest on the Flight into Egypt*, The Hispanic Society of America, 1690-1706.

Fig 7. Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, Seville Cathedral Chapter Room, 1662

Fig. 8. Engraving of Pedro Castro Vaca y Quiñones with image of Virgin of mmaculate Conception From: Heredia Barnuevo, Diego Nicolás de. 1741. *Mystico ramillete histórico, chronológico panegirico*. Granada: Imprenta Real