

The Creative Process in José de Páez: *Ciclo de la vida de la Virgen, Shrine of Guadalupe, San Felipe, Chihuahua, Mexico*

Ir a la versión en español

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ABSTRACT

A restoration project took place between 2015 and 2016 on ten pieces from the *Ciclo de la vida de la Virgen*, located in the Shrine of Guadalupe, in the state of Chihuahua, Mexico, signed by José de Páez and dated in 1772. An analysis of the artist's technical process was carried out in its framework, as a key component of this intervention. Said analysis was based on a study of the images' composition as well as the application of instrumental studies, such as optical microscopy and X-ray fluorescence (XRF). The results from this approach are valuable since they enhance our knowledge on Paez's materials and form of working in a period of artistic maturity, which displays his domination of traditions, and equally because they outline academic criteria.

KEY WORDS

José de Páez; easel painting; Colonial art; pictorial techniques

The Shrine of Guadalupe is located in the city of San Felipe, state of Chihuahua, Mexico —formerly the kingdom of New Biscay— and was built in the eighteenth century, during a period of prosperity linked to the rise of mining (Márquez, 2010, p. 60-63). This century saw the construction of most of its religious sites (Márquez, 2010, p. 60-74) and its most outstanding religious art was also imported (Bargellini, 2018, p.16-17). Thus, the Religious Art Mu-

Intervención

JULIO-DICIEMBRE 2021
 JULY-DECEMBER 2021

seum (MAS) in Chihuahua City houses names such as Juan Rodríguez Juárez (1675-1728), Miguel Cabrera (1695-1768), José de Páez (1721-?) and José de Alzibar (1730-1803), all of whom were eighteenth century painters (Espinosa, 2007, p. 1-10).

An example of such artistic importing is the *Ciclo de la vida de la Virgen (Life Cycle of the Virgin)* painted by the artist José de Páez in 1772 (Ramírez, 2018, p. 22). Originally composed of sixteen pieces, its textile supports are chronologically numbered according to the Virgin Mary's life. The numbering begins with the painting *La inmaculada concepción (The Immaculate Conception)* and culminates with *La coronación de la Virgen (The Coronation of the Virgin)*. Nowadays the cycle is divided: five of the pieces belong to MAS, ten are in the Shrine of Guadalupe and all traces of number thirteen have been lost; due to the chronology of the Virgin's life, it could well have been *Pentecostés (The Pentecost)*. An element that supports this theory is another *Ciclo de la vida de la Virgen* that Páez painted on metal sheets, which comprises the same scenes—except for *La coronación de la Virgen*, which was replaced there by *Los cinco señores (The Five Lords)*—and, indeed, includes *Pentecostés*. That cycle belongs to the convent of the Capuchin Poor Clares of Saint Mary of Guadalupe and Saint Colette.

Work was carried out on the set located in the Shrine of Guadalupe between 2015 and 2016, as a stage in a wide-ranging restoration project of José de Páez's creations, both in the Shrine and in the MAS, entrusted to master Magdalena Castañeda and B.A. José Alberto Gonzáles from the Seminar-Workshop of Restoration of Easel Paintings (STRPC) in the "Escuela Nacional de Conservación, Restauración y Museografía" (ENCRYM). The initiative and financing came from monsignor Víctor Manuel Gómez Royval, then parish priest at the shrine, in collaboration with Presbyter Paulo E. Medina Muñoz. The intervention of the works in the Shrine constituted my thesis work and thanks to it I was fortunate enough to delve into this artist's pictorial process.

The main problem with the works in the Shrine was that they had been removed from their stretchers, cut and then glued directly to the walls.¹ Therefore, it was not until they had been stripped away and the intervention carried out was it possible to expose the numbering on the back and the date of creation (1772) inscribed there

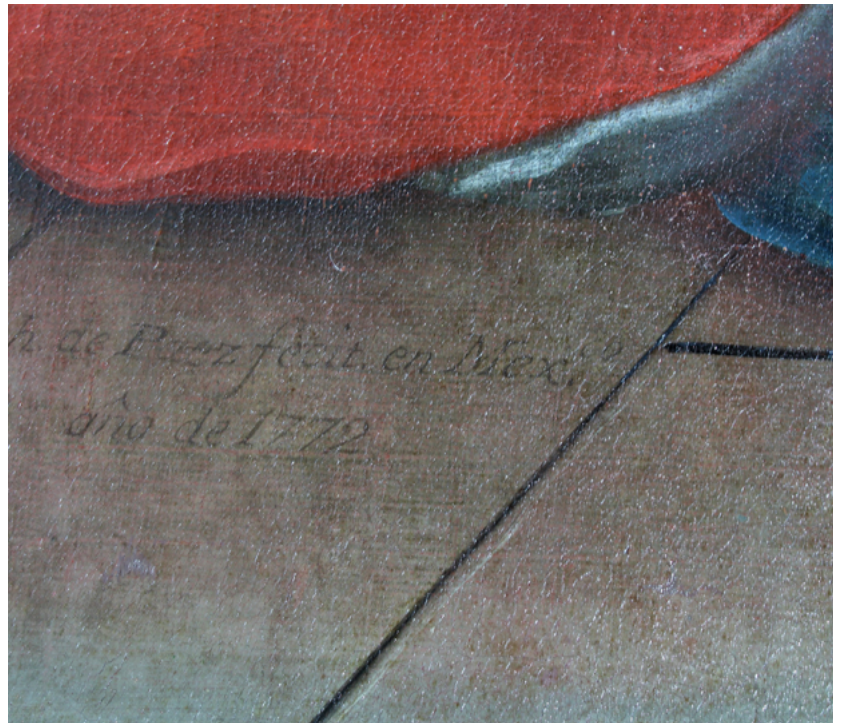
¹ 1 This intervention was extremely aggressive, if considering that for an easel painting is necessary to keep it straight on a frame to maintain uniform tension and prevent damage to the pictorial layer, such as scales, losses and deformation of the textile support (Villarquide, 2005, pp. 37-51). Those works were beginning to peel off the wall and, due to their location, they were exposed to moisture from the walls.

Intervención

JULIO-DICIEMBRE 2021
JULY-DECEMBER 2021

FIGURE 1 - Signature and date by José de Páez displayed on the painting *La inmaculada concepción*, which opens the *Ciclo de la vida de la Virgen*. It was possible to situate the cycle in a specific moment of the artist's development due to this signature (Photograph: Alberto González, 2016; courtesy of: Shrine of Guadalupe, Mexico).

next to Páez's signature on the piece *La inmaculada concepción* (Figure 1).



The discovery of the date helped situate the series in a precise moment of José de Páez's pictorial development. This period corresponds to an increase in production and a change of signature, which, as of 1770, went from the full form *Joseph* to the abbreviation *Jph.* (Castañeda, 2016, p. 35, 88). The aforementioned could be linked to a change in his perception as an artist, which could be interpreted as an awareness of maturity in his professional development.

Being an almost complete series, that was dated and signed, made this a valuable sample of this artist's work.² In the framework of the project, it was deemed that taking samples and tests with instruments would be tools to delve into the artist's technical and creative process. As Elsa Arroyo put it:

The availability of raw materials, the specific artistic processes and the ways in which the mixtures of materials that comprise each layer of a painting were prepared are indicative of the

² As part of the restoration methodology of the series, its formal analysis and instrumental was considered an essential exercise for decision-making appropriate and respectful in image treatments. The intervention of that series would set a precedent for the rest of the collection.

traditions and skills of each artist and creator in New Spain; hence, technical studies are more relevant when intending to analyze a pictorial series from the same workshop, of pertaining to the same space-time context (2017, p. 40).³

This ESSAY presents the palette and technical procedures José de Páez used, now available through this unique approach to his work with instrumental analysis. This approach supports the collective efforts linked to the identification of the technological aspects and materials in his works (Falcón, 2002; Arroyo, 2012; Insaurralde, 2018; Palomino, 2020). To date, there are few scientific studies of specific works enabling the identification of the palettes of artifice, the use of pigments or native materials, or the preparation of colors (Arroyo, 2017, p. 41). Furthermore, restorers should consider several of Páez's formal characteristics and aesthetic resources if they have the opportunity to intervene on work by this artist. It is noteworthy that the above-mentioned approach came about from the point of view of restoration and, therefore, is centered on the characteristics observed before, during and after the intervention.

The results of the restoration enabled us to appreciate the artist's formerly veiled particularities and, thus, strived to highlight the value of information that can be obtained through an integral conservation project.

THE ARTIST

José de Páez was born in Mexico City on December 7th, 1971 (Castañeda, 2016, p. 21). According to Guillermo Tovar de Teresa, he was the son of Balthasar de Páez, master examiner in the art of writing, and María Benites Quintanilla. Nicolás Enríquez (1995, p. 26) is assumed to have been his painting teacher. According to the signatures on his known works Castañeda (2016, p. 23) established his main period of production between 1750 and 1780, when he worked for various religious orders: Bethlemites, Oratorians, Franciscans, among others. His production themes focus on religious works, portraits and painting castes (Castañeda, 2016, p. 87-88). In 1768 he joined other artists in a petition to the Viceroy to create an Academy; moreover, he considered himself to be a professor of the "Most Noble Art of Painting" (Mues, 2008, p. 416). This, which is key to understanding his artistic procedure, allows us to perceive his product from a process ascribed to learned forms

³ All the quotes are editorial translations from the Spanish versions.

Intervención

JULIO-DICIEMBRE 2021
JULY-DECEMBER 2021

of conceiving an image's creation. Therefore, the composition, use of color and drawing can be appreciated from the perspective of solutions reached through a conscious decision making process.

Despite the recognition, Páez received during his lifetime his painting would subsequently be scorned. Romero de Terreros (2012, p. 26) considered his production to be “sweetish and even cloying”, with soft coloring and unoriginal compositions due to his “long-standing habit of copying whichever European painting fell into his hands”. Bernardo de Couto mentions that his work does not lack interest, however, his drawing is incorrect and his coloring unpleasant (1889, p. 71). During the twentieth century his work was judged with the prejudice surrounding eighteenth century painting: Manuel Toussaint considered it “decadent” (1990, p. 136). Despite that author eventually changing his mind (Mues, 2008, p. 38), eighteenth century painting kept that stigma.

There has been an effort to vindicate eighteenth century painting in recent decades. The height of this effort is documented in the 2017 exhibition *Pinxit Mexici* (Alcalá et al., 2017), which gave rise to the edition of an impressive volume that, among essays and prints of various works in excellent condition, recounts the contributions and main characteristics of art in New Spain during that century.

In his master's degree thesis, Castañeda (2016, p. 228) proposed a new approach to Páez's artistic personality. Accordingly, he explored the aesthetic values of the time as well as the social conditions surrounding the painter and the audience who validated his work. Thus, he understood Páez as a restless artist with a discursive success that allowed him to sell his work within and beyond New Spain.

In *Pinxit Mexici* he was categorized as a prolific painter who shares a common language with his generation of artists, despite having worked somewhat more independently (Alcalá et al., 2017, p. 35). Finally, in 2018 Ligia Fernández made a valuable description of the pieces from this cycle that belong to the MAS in Chihuahua. Her text highlights Páez's importance as a painter during the second half of the eighteenth century and stresses his capacity to create tender scenes with moving effects (2018, p. 126, 130).

METHODOLOGY AND REVIEW OF RESULTS: DESCRIBING JOSÉ DE PÁEZ'S WORK PROCESSES

To approach José de Páez's work we resorted to establishing the technical-pictorial⁴ sequence as a methodological tool based on two types of instrumental analysis: X-ray fluorescence (XRF)⁵ and microscopy of stratigraphic samples.⁶

The first identified the pigments used. For the thesis, 44 samples were taken from 2 paintings (22 each) *La inmaculada concepción* and *La adoración de los reyes* (*The Adoration of the Magi*), for they were esteemed to have the most representative colors of the series.

The second analysis aimed to recognize the disposition of pictorial layers and recreate their creative process through material evidence, in a similar way to what Falcón did in the José Juárez case (2002, p. 283). A total of 24 samples were taken: 6 from *La inmaculada concepción* and 9 each from *La adoración de los reyes* and *La dormición de la Virgen* (*The Dormition of the Virgin*). Those three paintings were deemed to contain an array of colors that were representative for the whole series. That sequence was developed more deeply in my B.A. thesis, where I also carried out a color-by-color analysis, in relation to all the samples taken (Ramírez, 2018, p. 101-125).

The information revealed by the sequence was subsequently linked to the composition process and to various artistic resources, to explore his technical and creative process. For the purpose of this ESSAY, the results and analysis will be presented in three sections: supports (stretchers and textiles); composition and drawing; then use of color. Lastly, conclusions will be reached, named Final Reflections: "from restoration to pictorial process".

⁴ The technical-pictorial sequence describes the way in which the material components of a painting are arranged to create an image with certain optic effects, such as volume, texture, lighting, and perspective. According to Castañeda, this way we acknowledge the artist's ability to acquire practical questions and recognize aspects of the pictorial tradition and technological innovation or ability to achieve a certain representation objective (2016, p. 95).

⁵ X-ray fluorescence (XRF). The XRF studies were carried out using a Bruker® pistol with a laptop (Tracer II-V + / III-SD). Were made 47 takes: 25 of *La adoración de los Reyes* and 22 of *La inmaculada concepción*, which, although limited, are representative of the identified colors.

⁶ Stratigraphic samples. 24 samples were taken from, *La adoración de los Reyes*, *La inmaculada concepción* y *La dormición de la Virgen*. Through its analysis, It was possible to observe the way in which José de Páez built the colors of the pictorial layers and how thanks to that arrangement he achieved the varied range of tones. After, the samples were analyzed on a Leica DMLM® microscope and photographed with a camera Motic 580®. The samples were embedded in epoxy-type resins in the laboratory of education of the ENCRyM, in charge of the chemist Javier Vázquez and with the supervision of the industrial chemistry technician Luz Esperanza López Méndez.

a) Supports: Stretchers and Textiles

As mentioned at the beginning of this ESSAY, the stretchers supporting the canvas had been removed from the pieces in the Shrine; however, from the MAS pieces it was possible to identify that the original stretchers had unions half way along the lateral and cross-piece woods, with corner notches in the crossbar. Mounting marks were found, indicating that the works could have been mounted *in situ* and the paintings travelled rolled up (Ramírez, 2018, p. 66).

With regard to the textile support, a 9 x 10 threads/cm² taffeta weave was identified; according to Abelardo Carrillo y Gariel (1983, p. 96) it was common for canvases in New Spain to present the same number of threads in both directions. No identification of textile fibers was carried out on the series of paintings in the Shrine. However, it was done on *La huida de Egipto* (*The Flight from Egypt*, part of the same collection but belonging to MAS) during its intervention at ENCRYM, where linen was detected (Vergara, 2017, p. 26), being the predominant fiber in the eighteenth century (Sumano, 2011, p. 204). All the supports are composed of three parts joined with a simple seam (Ramírez, 2018, p. 68), which was common in New Spain due to its elevated cost (Mues, 2017, p. 57).

b) Composition and Drawing

Composition will be analyzed here, starting with the ground layer.⁷ In addition to being a technical and traditional element common to paintings from New Spain, it is a typical part of how Páez forms visual characteristics. Huguette Palomino (2020, p. 85) notes that in the booklet *Opúsculo guadalupano*, Cabrera uses *disposing* as a synonym for *priming*, in such a way that “the preparation base and the invention⁸ homogenize, so the preliminary technical processes and the intellectual ones merge” and are, therefore, appropriated.

The stratigraphic samples identified the application of a glue ground layer to limit and even out the canvas’ absorption (Villarquide, 2005, p. 61). A red colored priming layer was applied over this, where angular charges of different sizes and colors can be observed. This variety could be due to the use of dry oils as bulk, as Palomino recommended (1797, p. 48), “when everything is ground add a portion of old colors if there are any, which are those discarded from the palette and brushes whenever they are cleaned”.

⁷ The terminology proposed by Gayo and Jover is taken up, where layer or base of preparation refers to the set of processes aimed at preparing the surface to paint, creating an interface; rig is defined as a succession of layers where the innermost is a sizing of organic material that acts as a sealing layer (García & Celis).

⁸ *Invention* is understood as the disposition that the characters have within a scene.

Intervención

JULIO-DICIEMBRE 2021
 JULY-DECEMBER 2021

During the first half of the seventeenth century, the use of colored primers spread rapidly through Spain as a transition towards new luminous and chromatic values (Gayo, 2010, p. 39). The use of reddish ground layers, with iron pigments, prevailed in paintings from New Spain in that century and the next (Arroyo, et al., 2012, p. 105-106; Mues, 2017, p. 58). That type of ground layer was the one identified in the paintings by José de Páez: it served to set the temperature of color and generate warm atmospheres (Castañeda, 2016, p. 145, 162).

This is the case with the present cycle, all the pieces have that red ground layer on which the composition was planned: location of characters, position, clothing, colors and backgrounds. The careful planning of these compositions is part of what gives the set its narrative power.

The creation of each scene involved sketching guidelines for perspective in architecture, floors, furniture and drapes. The organization and harmony of the compositions is clearly visible and simple; in most cases, the paintings only have two planes and the background. The elements within are balanced and in certain scenes, such as *La coronación* (*The Coronation*), *La asunción* (*The Assumption*) and *La inmaculada concepción*, the compositions are symmetrical. During the intervention it was clear that each of the figures was planned, for their contours could be observed in red primer, like outlines of the characters, as well as certain parts: a child's head and a hand writing (Figure 2), all these were also common elements of the period (Mues, 2017, p. 58).

FIGURE 2 - Contours of figures marked by the preparation base; this softens the outlines of figures, whose expressions sweeten under the spectator's very gaze (Photographs: Arantxa Ramírez/ Alberto González, 2016; courtesy of: Shrine of Guadalupe, Mexico).



Intervención

JULIO-DICIEMBRE 2021
 JULY-DECEMBER 2021

In this regard, a more detailed study of the engravings that inspired Páez would be necessary. It is well known that painted copies, engravings and treaties on pictorial theory were all part of the phenomenon of dissemination of ideas and artistic models throughout New Spain during the eighteenth century (Mues, 2017, p. 1-21). Castañeda (2016, p. 112) identifies certain incorporations of engravings in Páez's work. For example, in *Los siete sacramentos y los cuatro doctors de la Iglesia* (*The Seven Sacraments and The Four Doctors of the Church*, 1753) he includes drawings of the sacraments by Nicolas Poussin. He equally notes the use of Italian engravings for faces in *Nuestra Señora de la Piedad* (*Our Lady of Mercy*) and, furthermore, suggests that its composition was based on Joseph Sebastian Klauber and Johann Baptist Klauber's 1768 engravings of the *La letanía lauretana* (*Litany of the Blessed Virgin*, Castañeda, 2017, p. 153-154).

The idea of planned composition is supported by the few corrections present. Vergara reports pentimenti in *La huida de Egipto* from this series and interprets them as artistic spontaneity. In light of the few alterations found in the rest of the cycle, it is more likely to have been a conscientious decision to change his mind with regard to the sketch, in order to obtain better results for artist or patron.

In the case of the series I am involved with, two forms of providing depth were observed; although both can be present in the works, one predominates over the other, according to the scene: use of perspective and differences in lighting.

In the first instance, Páez used linear perspective to give the feeling of depth, which was observed in the direction of architectural elements and floors; this use was particularly notable in *La presentación de la Virgen* and *La presentación del Niño* (*The Presentation of the Child*), where columns and stairs meet at a vanishing point (Figure 3). In the second case the differences in lighting notably delimit different planes. In *El Nacimiento de la Virgen* (*The Birth of the Virgin*) the characters in the scene's foreground are much more illuminated and the light goes fading as one advances further into the room. The planes are identified through these changes and, furthermore, it establishes a visual tour that helps determine the piece's main characters and central theme (Figure 3).

Analysis of the set helped identify that Páez resorted to the use of red drapings for some of his backgrounds —such as *La anunciación*, *El nacimiento de la Virgen*, *La presentación de la Virgen*, *La presentación del Niño* — as a theatrical element that puts the

Intervención

JULIO-DICIEMBRE 2021
 JULY-DECEMBER 2021

FIGURE 3 – *La dormición de la Virgen* demonstrates that difference in lighting between the first and second planes generates a feeling of depth, while in *La presentación de la Virgen* this is achieved with the direction of lines of architecture, that allow a vanishing point (Photograph: Arantxa Ramírez, 2016; courtesy of: Shrine of Guadalupe, Mexico).



observer at a distance and creates warm, intimate atmospheres. However, in other cases he chose to represent open spaces — *La inmaculada concepción*, *La visitación*, *La ascunción*, *La coronación*, *La adoración de los Reyes* — or skies and vaporous landscapes.

Other interesting aspects observed regarding composition were certain artistic solutions that certainly made work in the studio swifter and enabled him to save on the cost of materials and time, such as, for example, taking advantage of the base preparation to cover large areas of paint in the backgrounds. Mues considers these practices allowed artists to manage their studios as businesses and deliver large orders (Mues, 2017, p. 59), as in Páez's case, known to have been an extremely prolific artist who repeated compositions with just a few changes to satisfy the large demand for his work (Castañeda, 2016, p. 34-35).

In addition, the repetition of patterns and characters were observed within the series itself (Figure 4). Páez must have had a large studio as well as enough assistants and tricks with which to increase his production without diminishing its quality. It would be worthwhile to establish whether such patterns were templates and how they were transferred to the painting. Those faces were undoubtedly worked and selected carefully by the artist for constant use, as can be seen in the visual solution of the four characters included in Figure 4, which from left to right and top to bottom correspond to the scenes: *La adoración de los Reyes* (face 1), *La presentación de la Virgen* (faces 2 and 3) and *La coronación de la Virgen* (face 4).

Páez insisted on representing domestic scenes, including everyday places, such as bedrooms, while the characters display fa-

Intervención

JULIO-DICIEMBRE 2021
 JULY-DECEMBER 2021

FIGURE 4 - These characters display the same facial pattern; their sizes are similar (Photograph: Arantxa Ramírez, 2016; courtesy of: Shrine of Guadalupe, Mexico).



miliar attitudes. This resource gives the pictorial set narrative and discursive effectiveness, making the spectator empathize with the scene. Indeed, during the eighteenth century narrative painting experienced a resurgence, manifested in its organic and idealized sensibility, where daily life elements were highlighted (Cuadriello, 2018, p. 193). This can be observed throughout Páez's compositions.

The number of characters is limited, though they always occupy approximately three quarters of the composition, in a privileged position, which facilitates reading the works. It was noted that Páez strived for greater naturalism representing the human body. Generally, the characters follow a proportion of eight heads. This type of search for more precise drawing brings to mind the founding pedagogical principle in San Carlos Academy, where students

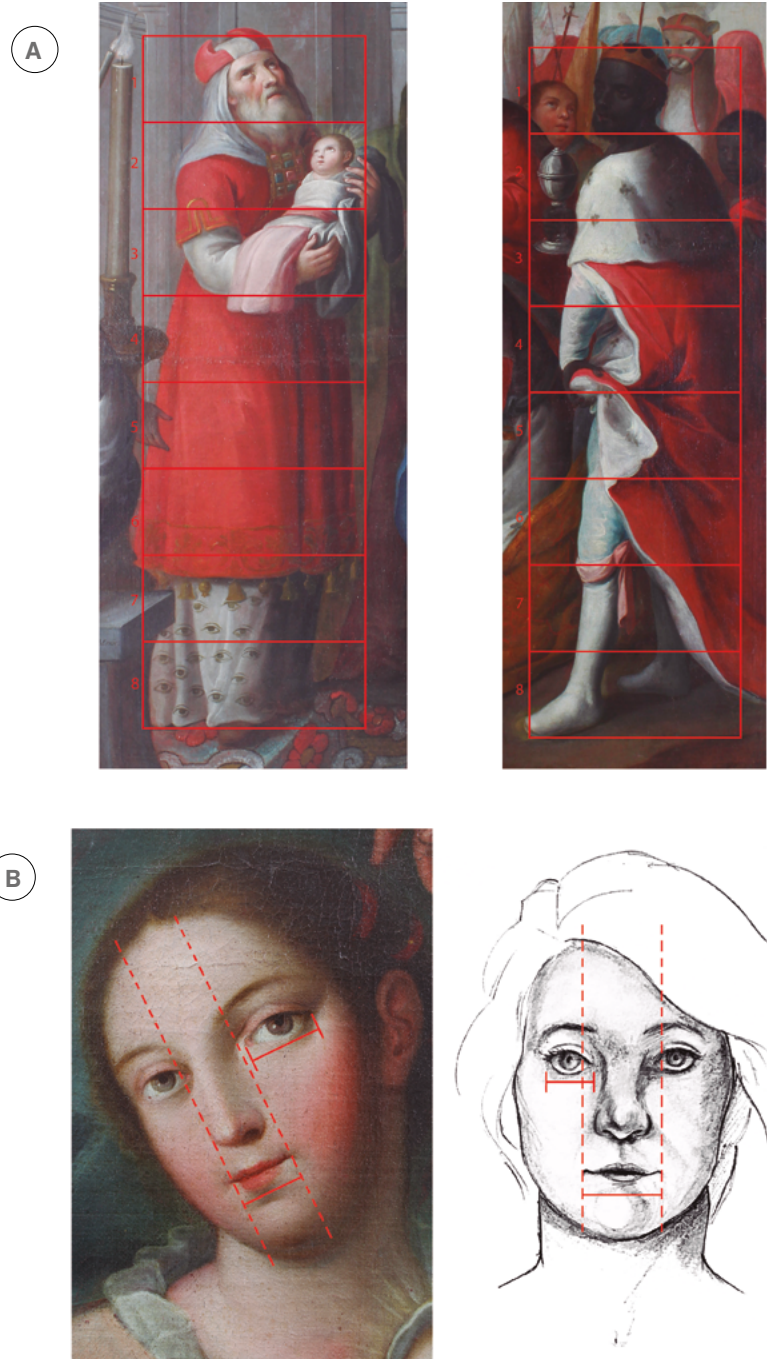
Intervención

JULIO-DICIEMBRE 2021
 JULY-DECEMBER 2021

started off by drawing copies (Aguilar, 2010, p. 187). Pupils would draw many limbs to memorize and master the human body, in order to acquire the capacity to develop new images by means of a sketch (Aguilar, 2010, p. 186). That proportion is also the one recommended by father Lana: “From the hairline to the tip of the chin is one eighth of the body” (Mues, 2006, p. 96) (Figure 5a).

Contrary to respect for body proportions, faces were noticeably infantilized: the eyes are slightly larger and the size of the mouth

FIGURE. 5 -
 Scheme of childlike proportions: a) in the face of the lady companion in *El Nacimiento de la Virgen*; note how the eyes are larger and the mouth is the size of the eyes; b) on the other hand, the proportion of upright figures is of eight heads—as Francesco Lana recommended—which corresponds to seeking greater naturalism
 (Photograph: Arantxa Ramírez/ Alberto González, 2016; courtesy of: Shrine of Guadalupe, Mexico).



is smaller than the body's anatomical measurements, particularly in women. On this subject, Lana mentioned the following: "the length of the eye some would like equal to the mouth, though in truth it is not so" (Mues, 2006, p. 96). It would seem Páez deliberately used those "incorrect" proportions because they render the character's expression sweeter, which caused certain critics to despise his work (Romero, 2012, p. 26). Nevertheless that, let us say, "disproportion" has also been a characteristic stamp of his production (Figure 5b). According to Rogelio Ruiz Gomar, the appeal of a serene expression was a common denominator in pictorial production of that century (Ruiz, 1988, p. 120-149), although in Páez's case it can even be endearing. I believe that behind the execution of that type of faces lies a search to create idealized characters and, thus, more heartwarming scenes.

c) Use of color

About the colors

During the study it was evident that color played a central role in the series' narrative. Its use to construct and delimit spaces, generate visual paths and emotions, so as to achieve a visual unit is undeniable. The stratigraphic study performed on the pictorial palette proved a valuable element to reveal José de Páez's way of painting.

Six main colors have been distinguished during the Viceregency: red, green, brown, blue, yellow, black and white (Arroyo, 2017, p. 42). In the case of this series, Páez started with those colors and created an array composed of twelve tones: light and dark for the skin color, red, blue, yellow, green, brown, grey, pink, orange, black and white. This range was produced using the pigments recommended by Palomino (1797, p. 45-48) and Pacheco (2001, p. 484-485), who mentions lead white, vermilion, bone black, indigo and smalt. The characteristic cations in these pigments can be identified through elementary instrumental studies, such as FRX. Below is a table containing the attributes of elements and their respective pigments, by color (Figure 6):

The possibility that dyes had been used in both blues and reds was advanced. In the case of red, it is believed it could be cochineal, particularly in the drapes, due to the tone and sensitivity to certain solvents (Ramírez, 2018, p. 78).

The analysis of blues was not revealing: it could be azurite, given the presence of copper, and being a pigment commonly used for the Virgin's mantles (Arroyo, *et al.*, 2012, p. 98), although its

Intervención

JULIO-DICIEMBRE 2021
JULY-DECEMBER 2021

Colour	Cation	Pigment	Formula	Reference
White	lead	white lead	lead hydroxycarbonate	Gómez, 2002, p. 58
Red	sulfide, mercury,	vermilion/cinnabar, red ocher	mercury sulfide	Bruquetas, 2002, p. 186
	iron	red ocher	iron oxide	Bruquetas, 2002, p. 188
Blue	copper	azurite	copper carbonate	
Yellow	arsenic	orpiment	arsenic trisulfide	Bruquetas, p. 160
	iron	ocher	iron oxide	Bruquetas, p.161
Brown	iron	earth colours and shadows	iron oxide	Bruquetas, p.161
Black	without cation	lamblack		Bruquetas, p.196-197

FIGURE 6 - Table correlating colors, cations identified, corresponding pigments and the relevant formula (Source: Arantxa Ramírez, 2021).

use decreased in the eighteenth century (Insaurralde, 2018, p. 286). Another possibility is the use of indigo; in fact, one of the samples reacted to ethyl acetate, which is able to solubilize indigotine (Castañeda, 2019, p. 28, 33), which suggests the presence of this coloring. Furthermore, the visual characteristics of the series' blue stratigraphic samples resemble what Meza (2014, p. 127) described: under the optic microscope, the painting coat only appears as "colored" or "dyed" matrixes, instead of observing pigment particles. In addition, certain blues are similar to the indigo conglomerates mentioned by María Castañeda (2019, p. 159). Indigo has also been identified in paintings by the Arellanos, painters who were close to José de Páez in time (Insaurralde, 2018, p. 261).

About the Work Process

Part of my thesis included an analysis of the stratigraphy of each color and I noted the presence of between two and four stages of building (Ramírez, 2018, p. 75-95), first applying a darker shade, followed by lighter shades or, failing that, several coats of a similar color, starting with a red preparation base. It is believed this building through glazes could be those the paragraphs added to the treaty *El arte maestra* referred to, which mentioned the introduction of mixtures of colors from the brushes to the canvas (Mues,

2006, p. 102; Mues, 2017, p. 58). Huguette Palomino indicates that Ibarra also resorted to that type of building, particularly to provide luminosity (2020, p. 119).

For the purposes of this essay, I retake the analysis of the stratigraphic samples of the carnations, the reds and blues, since they illustrate the logic behind how Páez built color.

Incarnations

Two types of carnation were identified: one a *beige* color used for the majority of characters, with different degrees of luminosity and saturation —always lighter for the Virgin— and black for one of the Magi and his assistant. They all started with a compact red base preparation. In the case of the *beige* carnation, Páez used a slightly yellow base which was achieved by combining several pigments; according to the desired result, in some cases there were more white particles than red. Another type of *beige* carnation was found in *La dormición de la Virgen*, a scene in penumbra where, to match, the yellow was much darker, thicker and with a greater load of shadows.

However, a clear difference was observed between the building of *beige* carnations and that of King Balthazar. In his case, after the red base preparation (in the case of the sample of King Balthazar it appears more orange, but this is perhaps due to an unintentional lower quantity of red ochre) the base color was a greyish blue. While for the first type of carnation the yellow illuminated and lightened the subsequent colors, in the second type, the blue darkened and counteracted the warmth of the ground layer. Hence the king's skin acquired quite a dark tone that is striking in contrast with other carnations (Figure 7).

Meanwhile, observing the series made it manifest that Páez used carnation as a narrative element. For example, he always shows the Virgin Mary as the main character through a more luminous face and, in the case of *La dormición*, not only are the apostles' skins darker, which is more coherent with the scene's lighting, it also corresponds to the feeling of grief. Equally, the further back the characters are from the foreground, the more blurred the details and brushstrokes, to mark distance and reduce status, which involves an overwhelming intent, as seen with the apostles in *La asunción* whose features are barely visible (Figure 8).

Intervención

JULIO-DICIEMBRE 2021
 JULY-DECEMBER 2021

FIGURE 7 - These images show the different buildings of carnations and their results. One can see that both samples have part of red preparation base (PB) to then apply, for Saint Ann's lighter carnation in *La inmaculada concepción*, a yellow base (E1a) followed by an almost-white beige (E2a). In contrast, for the black carnation of King Balthazar in *La adoración de los Reyes* after the preparation base Páez applied a grey (E1b) background color followed by black (E2b). (Photograph: Arantxa Ramírez, 2016; courtesy of: Shrine of Guadalupe, Mexico).

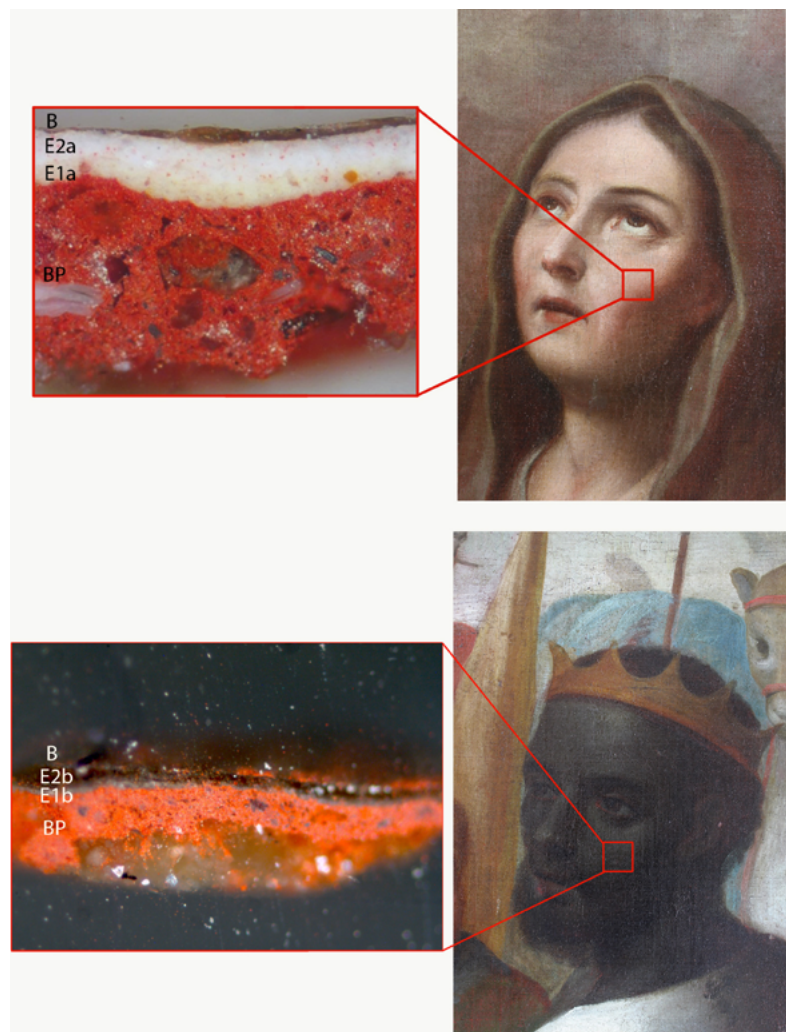
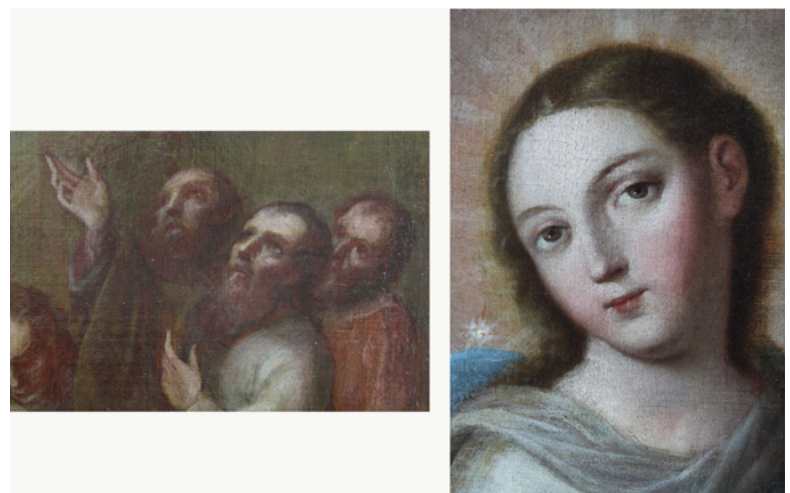


FIGURE 8 - In *La asunción*, the carnation of the apostles was built through extremely faint brushstrokes that were blurred; this marks distance and reduces the status of the characters. (Photograph: Alberto González, 2016; courtesy of: Shrine of Guadalupe, Mexico).



Intervención

JULIO-DICIEMBRE 2021
 JULY-DECEMBER 2021

Reds

One of the most dominant colors in the series is red, in different saturations and luminosities: it was used for tablecloths, curtains, clothing and backgrounds (Figure 9). Páez applied a darker red over the base preparation in certain zones, before applying a brighter one. The result is a chromatic range of red that is different from the base preparation. This procedure takes advantage of it and modulates it through the application of thin layers. This technique was found in *La dormición* and in *La adoración de los Reyes* (Figure 10).



FIGURE 9 - Páez resorted to reds in his compositions to take advantage of the preparation base for curtains and tablecloths in *La asunción* and *La presentación del Niño* (Photographs: Arantxa Ramírez, 2016; courtesy of: Shrine of Guadalupe, Mexico).

In addition, certain zones were detected where Páez took advantage of the color in the base preparation almost completely and barely placed glaze to accent it, as can be seen in one of the kings' capes in *La adoración*.

Intervención

JULIO-DICIEMBRE 2021
 JULY-DECEMBER 2021



FIGURE 10 - Stratigraphic of different ways of constructing the color red. One can notice on the samples that after the red-based preparation (BP), *La adoración de los Reyes* has a barely visible red glazing (E1a). Meanwhile, *La dormición* samples have a layer of darker red (E1b y E1c) followed by a red similar to the base preparation (E2b y E2c). Photographs: Arantxa Ramírez/Luz Esperanza López, 2016; courtesy of: Shrine of Guadalupe, Mexico).

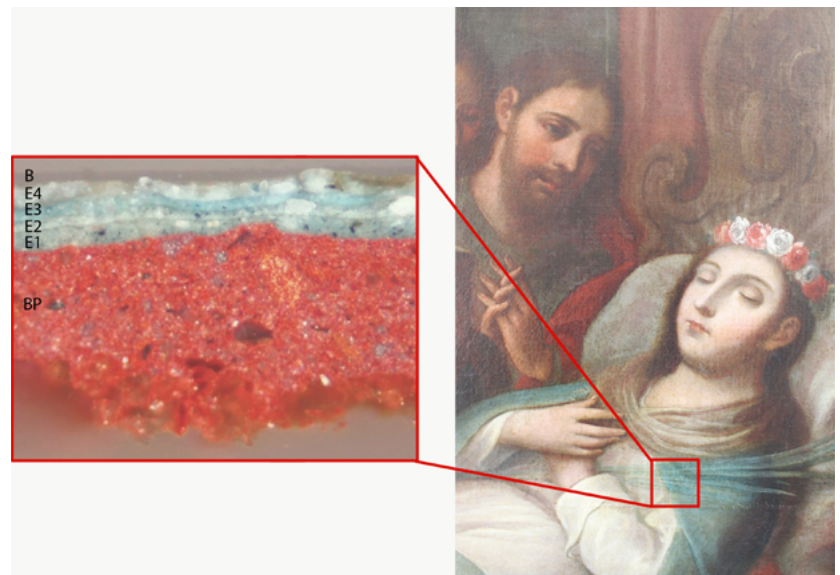
Blues

The second most used color is blue; analysis helped identify the different manners these were worked. For dark, Páez placed a dull blue base to provide a colder background to the following layers. This procedure allowed the blues not to tend to purple, which would have occurred had light blue been applied directly to the red base. Nevertheless, the applications are so fine the red ground layer vibrates below the blue. Páez created lighter shades of blue through several layers mixed with white. One of the most outstanding and well-executed tasks is visible in the palm held by the Virgin in *La dormición*. Admirable glazing work can be seen in this area, where it is perfectly understandable where the mantle ends and the palm begins, although both of them are blue (Figure 11).

Intervención

JULIO-DICIEMBRE 2021
 JULY-DECEMBER 2021

FIGURE 11 - Stratigraphy of the blue palm in *La dormición de la Virgen*; one can see how Páez applied different blue glazings (E1, E2, E3, E4) to the base preparation. The result is a blue palm over the Virgin's mantle of the same color, in which each is distinguishable from the other. The stratigraphy also shows how the matrices in certain layers seen to be "tinted", especially E1 and E2; furthermore, possible conglomerates of indigo are observed in those same layers (Photograph: Arantxa Ramírez, 2016; courtesy of: Shrine of Guadalupe, Mexico).



The only color building that differs from the former in that it starts with a lighter one is Caspar's gold cape, in *La adoración de los Reyes*, where Páez applied two coats of almost white yellow over the base. With this he obtained a luminous background to achieve a gold that depicts luxury and riches (Figure 12).

The stratigraphic samples confirmed that Páez worked by superimposing layers of paint, which validates Castañeda's (2016, p. 100) conjecture, when he suggested the artist helped obtain a certain color by placing color mixtures one over another.

Páez usually started with a darker base, modulating it afterwards with lighter shades. An important characteristic of this superposition is the thickness of the layers vis-à-vis the preparation base, for their proportions are around 4:1. Further to creating different colors, the glazing helped create half shades, lights and shadows that are part of the volume, depth of field and texture effects. Vergara noted "the soft, warm and subtle appearance of José de Páez's work which, added to his chromatic selection, composition and building of forms, by thick red preparation bases (with regard to the painting layer) as well as subtle paint layers, worked through glazing and impasto" (Vergara, 2017, p. 47). This method of work with glazing has also been observed in Ibarra (Palomino, 2018, p. 117) and in paintings by the Arellanos (Palomino, 2018, p. 255-265). Insaurralde considers that when they departed from firm drawing to venture into undefined brushstrokes, alternating the use of glazing with thick coats in the lights, they forged an innovative path and created an expressive intensity that would achieve full prominence in the eighteenth century (Insaurralde, 2018, p. 98).

Intervención

JULIO-DICIEMBRE 2021
JULY-DECEMBER 2021

FIGURE 12 - Building of the golden color, which varies from the rest by starting with a light base, to give it greater luminosity.

In this case one can see the base preparation followed by two layers of light yellow (E1 y E2) on which the gold color (E3) was applied (Photograph: Luz Esperanza López/ Alberto González, 2016; courtesy of: Shrine of Guadalupe, Mexico).



In sum, workspaces were built by glazing, combined with heavier and denser brushstrokes in larger areas, such as the details of architecture. The base's vibration enabled textures to be generated and the nuancing of certain lights. This type of finishing is part of the new graphic registry Insaurrealde (2019, p. 229) referred to, not characterized by strong luminous contrasts, but rather, by less rigid contours and more balanced luminosity.

Páez demonstrates use of this new graphic registry in his warm, harmonious chromatic range, in the use of a pastel palette and diffuse light in all the scenes, all typical of eighteenth century painting which can be observed in transition painters such as the Arellanos (Insaurrealde, 2016, p. 229) and later on in Antonio de Torres (1667-1731), Nicolás Enríquez (1704-c. 1790), Juan Rodríguez Juárez (1675-1728), José de Ibarra (1685-1756), Francisco Martínez (1687-1758), Manuel Carcanio (c. 1705-1793), José de Alzibar (1726-1803), Miguel Cabrera (1695-1768) (Alcalá, 2017, p. 17-35). Mixing white with most of the colors was fundamental to obtain these results, as shown by the stratigraphic samples, where particles of white pigment and lead were identified in all colors, denoting the wide use of white lead. This type of finishing, with little contrast and soft colors, are recommended by father Lana: "the degradation must be soft and the colors almost imperceptible: the sweetness of coloring depends on that imperceptible degradation, while offensive harshness is avoided" (Mues, 2006, p. 63).

Finally, through the above-mentioned characteristics, we catch a glimpse of Páez's style. According to historian Meyer Schapiro (1953, p. 287), style is a system of form with visual qualities and expressions through which an artist's personality can be seen. In my opinion, technique and style have mutual repercussions: to achieve visual characteristics requires mastery of a way of working, and in that mode of work one can find solutions and motives identified in the style.

Thus, while working with the *Ciclo de la vida de la Virgen* by José de Páez, many characteristics common to eighteenth century painting were recognized, such as orderly, warm and emotive com-

Intervención

JULIO-DICIEMBRE 2021
 JULY-DECEMBER 2021

positions built on red ground layers; use of color through glazing; simple, warm, domestic atmospheres; others are more Academic, such as perspectives based on a vanishing point and characters with more naturalism in their proportions, in addition to particularities that distinguish the artist, such as faces with childlike proportions to sensitize the spectator

FINAL REFLECTIONS: FROM RESTORATION TO PICTORIAL PROCESS

Does a restorer have anything to say once the intervention on the piece has concluded? The mere existence of *Intervención* is a resounding yes. In integral projects particularly, through their unique proximity to the works, restorers become mediators between different disciplines, capable of obtaining information that enriches not only their own profession but other fields of study as well.

First and foremost, it would be important for restorers who approach Páez's work to take certain considerations into account while treating the image. During the partial varnish removal, dragging it to the edges must be avoided, for if done in excess it could harden and erase the blurred effect in that painting. Equally, it must be kept in mind that the glazings are very thin, so it is necessary to proceed slowly and without rubbing, to avoid eliminating them, particularly the blues and reds, which could contain colors, that are sensitive to certain solvents. Finally, when it is time to reinte-

FIGURE 13 - Before and after the intervention on *La coronación* (Photographs: Arantxa Ramírez/ Alberto González, 2016; courtesy of: Shrine of Guadalupe, Mexico).



Intervención

JULIO-DICIEMBRE 2021
JULY-DECEMBER 2021

grate, one should avoid excessive use of nurture with points with the same color of the original, which could affect perception of the glazing. This project's results were extremely satisfactory, for Páez's characteristic delicate brushwork sprung forth from under yellowish coats of varnish, as can be seen below.

As for other aspects, the long hours behind the works, carrying out the processes required to stabilize the support and the image; the time spent observing each of the stratigraphic samples under the microscope, along with the ulterior analysis of the image and its visual characteristics; are all routes that lead the restorer down a path full of discoveries. The specificities of the work appear then: its technical qualities, the way its materials behave. The analysis of both images and instruments for this essay were directed at revealing the technical process and materials used by José de Páez which, in turn, adds to our overall understanding of eighteenth century pictorial processes.

Finally, the study of this series provides research on the artist in a specific moment and, therefore, works as a reference for future approaches. Furthermore, it is a first step towards understanding, with more evidence, the pictorial development of José de Páez and the artistic resources he could summon to convert an idea into a pictorial representation.

From the point of view of art history, Páez can be seen as an artist who mastered his trade, was able to manage a large studio with popular, appreciated works, and who assumed the common language of the eighteenth century; the restoration has revealed not only his facet as an artist but also his skill behind the brush and prowess with materials and technique. The survival of this cycle in relatively adequate conditions, despite the extremely aggressive intervention the paintings suffered, is a testament to Páez's expertise in creating pieces of simply admirable quality.

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Intervención

JULIO-DICIEMBRE 2021
 JULY-DECEMBER 2021

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