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Vicente López Portaña  
*Manuel Gaviria y Alcoba, Conde de Buena Esperanza  
and Marqués de Casa Gaviria, 1840.*

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VICENTE LÓPEZ PORTAÑA

(Valencia 1772 – Madrid 1850)

MANUEL GAVIRIA Y ALCOBA, CONDE DE BUENA ESPERANZA AND MARQUÉS DE  
CASA GAVIRIA  
1840

Oil on canvas.

129 x 96 cm; 50 ¾ x 37 ¾ in.

Signed "V.<sup>te</sup> Lopez f.<sup>o</sup> 1840," lower left.

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## Provenance

José Bertrán y Musitú (1875-1957), Barcelona;

Confiscated during the Spanish Civil War;

Miguel Mateu Plá, Barcelona;

Restored to the Bertrán family by Mateu's descendants;

Thence by descent, Bertrán Collection, Barcelona.

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## Literature

Aguilera, E.M., *Vicente López*, Madrid 1946, p. 21, lám. 39;

Díez, J.L., *Vicente López (1772-1850) Catálogo Razonado*, Madrid 1999, p. 144, P-584, lám. 249;

Díez, J.L., *Vicente López (1772-1850) Vida y Obra*, Madrid 1999, p. 339, P-584;

Gaya Nuño, J.A., *Arte del siglo XIX. Ars Hispaniae XIX*, Madrid 1966, p. 107;

Morales y Marín, J.L., *Vicente López*, Zaragoza 1980, p.98, n° 237;

Monreal y Tejada, L., *Casa Bertrán en San Gervasio*, Barcelona 1985, p. 86, p. 130, n° 39.

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## Exhibitions

*Vicente López*. Palacio de la Virreina, Barcelona, 1943 (n° 31).

*La Colección Bertran. La memoria de un legado familiar*. Sala Can Rocamora. Museu de Maricel, Sitges, 23 June – 15 October 2023.

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Standing to the knee, the sitter is shown three-quarters turned, his face directed towards the viewer, dressed in a black tailcoat and wearing the sash of the Order of Isabel la Católica together with the cross and plaque of Commander of the Order of Carlos III. His right hand rests on a writing desk strewn with papers and his left on the arm of a chair. Behind him, a half-drawn curtain reveals a large window, the soft light it admits washing evenly across the composition. Manuel de Gaviria y Alcoba (1794–1855) was a Senator of the Kingdom and *Gentilhombre de Cámara* in ordinary, shown here, fittingly, as a man of business among his papers as much as a courtier distinguished by his decorations. He would go on to become treasurer of the Royal Household and, together with José de Salamanca, co-founder of the Banco de Isabel II.

The portrait was painted in a year of political drama for Spain. 1840 saw the end of the First Carlist War, the departure into exile of the queen regent María Cristina, and the assumption of the regency by General Espartero. Spain's aristocracy found itself navigating this instability while trying to demonstrate loyalty to the child queen, Isabel II, whose own claim to the throne remained contested. It was against this backdrop that a young, ambitious courtier would have had good reason to commission such a lavish portrait of himself. A public display of loyalty and status at a moment when both could be called into question.

The sitter's identity requires a note of caution regarding his title. Although the portrait has traditionally been known as that of the "Marqués de Casa Gaviria" or "Marqués de Gaviria," Manuel Gaviria y Alcoba did not in fact hold that title at the time of sitting. It was his father, Manuel de Gaviria y Douza, for whom he had himself petitioned the grant of the marquesado de Casa Gaviria, a petition granted by the regent María Cristina on 29 April of that same year. A further portrait of him by López survived in the Zuloaga collection at Zumaya (fig. 1). The title passed to the sitter of the present portrait only in 1852 upon obtaining his own *carta de sucesión*. It was at that point that the title's form was altered to "Marqués de Gaviria." At the moment this portrait was painted, the sitter's own honour was the newly granted Condado de Buena Esperanza.<sup>1</sup>

Compositionally, the portrait follows the same scheme (a half-drawn curtain, a source of light to the side, the sitter positioned before a window) that López would use five years later for the pendant portraits of the sitter's own parents, the Marqués and Marquesa de Casa Gaviria, with which this canvas forms a group despite the difference in date. It belongs, more broadly, to a moment in which López began to admit into his portraiture something of the private, domestic sensibility associated with Romanticism. Even in overtly official commissions of this kind, executed in a cool and studied pose, the sitter's personality is treated with a new degree of intimacy, no longer serving merely as a public showcase for social rank. The three canvases would likely have hung together in the family's Madrid residences and, from 1851, in the Palacio de Gaviria on Calle Arenal, the grand town house the sitter built between 1846 and 1851, inaugurated with a ball attended by the queen herself.

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<sup>1</sup> Monreal y Tejada, L., *Casa Bertrán en San Gervasio*, Barcelona 1985, p. 88.

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The sitter's death and the exposure the family's fortunes suffered through the Banco de Isabel II's absorption in 1847 offer a plausible explanation for the collection's eventual dispersal. Once in the Bertrán collection, the portrait shared the same fate as that of the sitter's mother, the *Marquesa de Casa Gaviria* (fig. 2). Both were confiscated from José Bertrán y Musitú's Barcelona collection during the Spanish Civil War and passed into the hands of Miguel Mateu y Plá. His descendants subsequently restored both canvases to their original and legitimate owners.<sup>2</sup>

The picture belongs to a small group of four major portraits by López singled out within the Bertrán collection for the quality and consistency of their execution. According to the testimony of the Marqués de Lozoya, who had studied the painter's life and work closely during his years as a professor in Valencia, López was a man of scrupulous artistic integrity who signed only those works entirely of his own hand, without studio assistance, a claim these four canvases were held to confirm.<sup>3</sup> The collection itself owed something to a friendship between collectors. José Bertrán y Musitú shared his enthusiasm for López with his close friend Miguel Mateu y Plá, and the two men frequently exchanged and lent works to one another. It is a private history of cordial rivalry that lends a particular resonance to the picture's own passage, decades later, between the two families' collections during the Civil War.

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<sup>2</sup> Díez, J.L., *Vicente López (1772-1850) Catálogo Razonado*, Madrid 1999, p. 144.

<sup>3</sup> Monreal y Tejada, L., *Casa Bertrán en San Gervasio*, Barcelona 1985, p. 84.

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Fig. 1, Vicente López Portaña, *Manuel de Gaviria y Douza, Marqués de Casa Gaviria*, oil on canvas, 128 x 97 cm, Zuloaga Collection, Zumaya, Guipúzcoa.

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Fig. 2, Vicente López Portaña, *Antonia Alcoba Mateos, Marquesa de Casa Gaviria*, oil on canvas, 128 x 97 cm, Colección Bertrán.

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