COLNAGHI



Vicente Albán
Portraits of the García de León y Pizarro Family,
1783

VICENTE ALBÁN
(Quito, active 1767 – 1796)

PORTRAIT OF DON JOSÉ GARCÍA DE LEÓN Y PIZARRO

Inscribed on the reverse: 'Ilmo. Sr. Dn. José García de León y Pizarro'
Label on the reverse: 'Ilmo. Sr. D. José García de León y Pizarro, natural de Motril, del Consejo de S. M. en el Supremo de Indias, Presidente, Gobernador, Visitador Gl. y Comandte. Gl. que fue del Reino de Quito. Magistrado sabio y celoso, cuyas prendas relevantes en su vida pública y privada le hicieron amar de propios y extraños. Murió en 30. de Marzo de 1798 á los 68. años de su edad'

Oil on canvas
89 x 74 cm
35 x 29 1/8 in.

PORTRAIT OF DOÑA MICAELA MARÍA JIMÉNEZ DE FRÍAS Y PIZARRO

Inscribed on the reverse: 'Ilma. Sra. Da. Micaela de Frías y Pizarro'
Label on the reverse: 'Ilma. Sra. Da. Mª. Micaela de Frías y Pizarro, natural de Ronda, Esposa del Ilmo. Sr. D. José García de León y Pizarro, Consejero de Indias, Presidente de Quito. Nació en 23. de Enero 1746. Murió en 1815'

Oil on canvas
97.5 x 74 cm
38 3/8 × 29 1/8 in.

PORTRAIT OF DOÑA MARÍA DE LOS DOLORES GARCÍA DE LEÓN Y PIZARRO Y JIMÉNEZ DE FRÍAS

Label on the reverse: 'Ilma. Sra. Da. Mª. de los Dolores García de León Pizarro y Frías, Esposa del Ilmo. Sr. D. Manuel de Valenzuela, Conde de la Puebla de los Valles, Consejero de Hacienda. Nació en 12. Enero 1763. Falleció en 1822'

Oil on canvas
78 × 66 cm
30 3/4 × 26 in.

PORTRAIT OF DOÑA JOSEFA DE LAS ANGUSTIAS GARCÍA DE LEÓN Y PIZARRO Y JIMÉNEZ DE FRÍAS

Label on the reverse: 'Ilma. Sra. Da. Josefa de las Angustias García de León Pizarro y Frías, Esposa del Ilmo. Sr. D. Juan José de Villalengua y Marfil, Consejero de Indias'

Oil on canvas
84 × 69.5 cm
33 1/8 × 27 3/8 in.

PORTRAIT OF DON JOSÉ GARCÍA DE LEÓN Y PIZARRO Y JIMÉNEZ DE FRÍAS

Signed and dated lower left: 'Visente Alban pinxit à. 1783'

Oil on canvas
87 x 64.5 cm
25 3/8 x 34 ¼ in.

Provenance

Probably commissioned by Don José García de León y Pizarro, Quito, 1783–1798;
Thence by descent to his son, Don José García de León y Pizarro y Jiménez de Frías, Paris and Madrid, 1797–1835;
Thence by descent to his son, Don José García de León y Pizarro, Madrid, 1835–1882;
Thence, after the death of his widow, Doña Isabel López y López, in 1908, to his niece, Marie García de León y Pizarro, Baroness de Steenhault de Waerbeeck, Château de Steenhault, Belgium, 1908–1925;
Thence by descent to her son, Léon, Baron de Steenhault de Waerbeeck, Château de Steenhault, Belgium, 1925–1939;
Thence by descent to the present owners.

Comparative literature

Ágreda Pino, A. and Naya Franco, C., 'De Amadeo de Saboya a Beatriz Ximénez Cerdán: El pinjante relicario del Espíritu Santo donado al joyero del Pilar por la condesa de Contamina y marquesa de Bárboles (1695)', *Sarmental: Estudios de Historia del Arte y Patrimonio*, no. 1, 2022, pp. 181–190.
Beerman, E., 'Pizarro', *Revista de Historia Naval*, no. 31, 1990, p. 43.
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Velasco, J. de, *Historia del Reino de Quito en la América Meridional*, Quito, 1979, vol. 3, p. 128.











The exceptional character of this group of paintings can hardly be overstated. It is very rare for a single painter to have been commissioned, at one and the same time, to portray every member of a family, children included, five sitters in all, and rarer still for such a gallery to have survived intact in the same family across more than two centuries. When the prominence of the sitters and the stature of the painter who carried out the commission are also considered, the singularity of the ensemble becomes all the more evident.

The family in question is that of Don José García de León y Pizarro, comprising his wife, Doña Micaela María Jiménez de Frías y Pizarro, and their three children, María de los Dolores, Josefa de las Angustias and José García de León y Pizarro y Jiménez de Frías. Don José, the head of the family, was one of the most distinguished figures of the viceregal administration, rising to become regent and president of the Real Audiencia of Quito between 1776 and 1784. The present canvas is, in fact, the third known likeness of him. It joins the only image hitherto known to the public, a figure within the far more complex composition of the Visit to the Hospital of San Juan de Dios (fig. 1), and the copper oval presented to him by the Real Audiencia of Quito when he relinquished its presidency (fig. 2), both by José Cortés de Alcocer. In Albán's portrait, however, he appears not in court dress, with breeches, waistcoat and coat, but in the black gown, *golilla* collar and white gloves proper to the magistrates and *letrados* of the Spanish *chancillerías* and *audiencias*, so that the emphasis falls on his office as an administrator of justice in the Audiencia of Quito.

The two books on the table further reinforce the point: the third volume of the *Recopilación de leyes de los reynos de las Indias* and the *Ordenanzas militares*. In 1774, in the reign of Charles III, a new edition of the *Recopilación* was published in Madrid in four volumes. The third of these contains Books VI to VIII, the last being precisely the one devoted to accounts, the tribunals of the *Real Hacienda*, the royal treasuries and the various taxes, as well as part of Book IX, which contains the legislation on the *Casa de la Contratación* in Seville and the administration of trade with the Americas. It should be borne in mind that García de León y Pizarro held the presidency of Quito from 1776 to 1784 and that in 1783 he was, moreover, appointed to the Council of the Indies, which accounts for this particular representation, made in that same year. His portrayal beside the third volume thus serves a precise iconographic purpose: to exalt his work as reformer of the finances of Quito, one of the greatest achievements of his government.

The other volume on the table, the *Ordenanzas militares*, alludes to his standing as a military authority, for García de León y Pizarro also exercised the functions of captain general and thus held authority over the defence of the territory. This twofold role, administrative and military, underlines the part he played in the great Bourbon reforms of the period.

The accoutrements of office are completed by the baton of command, the sword, the hat and, on his breast, the cross of the Order of Charles III, an honour the king conferred on him on 23 April 1780, although the legal formalities for its definitive

award were not concluded until 10 June 1782.[1] This accords with the date at which the paintings were executed. Finally, the stone monolith beside which he stands, carved with the family arms, deserves notice: it is a less usual solution than that of setting the arms in colour, floating in a corner of the composition.

The second canvas of the series represents his wife, Micaela María Jiménez de Frías y Pizarro, whom he married at Ronda on 16 January 1759. She was a native of that city, where she had been baptised on 23 January 1746, the daughter of Francisco de Frías and Josefa de Pizarro.[2] She holds a folded fan in her right hand and a small open book in her left. She wears a gala dress in the late Rococo fashion, probably of silk, in an intense red. The bodice is closely fitted, as are the sleeves, which end at the elbow in a full flounce trimmed with lace, while the skirt owes its breadth to petticoats or a hoop. Large bows striped in blue and white adorn the breast and the sleeves.

Most striking of all, however, is the jewellery. At her wrists she wears several parallel strands of pearls, and at her ears, large pendant earrings of what appear to be diamonds. The most remarkable of the jewels is the necklace, repeated in the portraits of her two daughters: what the specialist vocabulary calls an *ahogador con pinjante*, a choker with pendant, likewise set with diamonds (fig. 3). The pendant takes the form of a dove, a jewel that enjoyed a certain vogue among the Spanish elites of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Such pieces were commonly known as *Espíritu Santos*, since they derive from the dove so familiar from the Gospels as the figure of the third person of the Trinity. Several examples have been documented, both in archival sources and in collections such as the treasuries of the Virgen del Pilar in Zaragoza and the Virgen de Guadalupe in Extremadura, and the Instituto Valencia de Don Juan in Madrid (fig. 4).[3]

The portraits of the couple's daughters, María de los Dolores and Josefa de las Angustias, read as a kind of echo of their mother's: they are dressed exactly as she is, only with the colours reversed, the gown now blue and the bows red. Both portraits repeat the powdered wigs, the jewels, the lace at the cuffs and the watches hanging at the waist, though the fan and book are replaced by flowers held in the hand. Other portraits of the period, it may be noted, show women of the Spanish American elite wearing similar watches, sometimes in pairs, as in Joaquín Gutiérrez's *portrait of Doña María Tadea González* (1775) in Colombia, or that of *Doña Juana María Romero* in Mexico. The latter has even earned its sitter the nickname "la Relojera", the watch lady, on account of the conspicuous presence of the watches in her portrait (fig. 5).

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[1] Archivo Histórico Nacional (AHN), Madrid, Estado-Carlos III, exp. 137, *Expediente de pruebas de caballero de la orden de Carlos III de don José García de León y Pizarro León y Rivera, natural de Motril, Presidente y Regente de la Audiencia de Quito; caballero supernumerario, 1780–1782*.

[2] José María Vallejo García-Hevia, *La Segunda Carolina: El Nuevo Código de Leyes de las Indias. Sus Juntas Recopiladoras, sus Secretarios y el Real Consejo (1776–1820)* (Madrid: Agencia Estatal Boletín Oficial del Estado, 2016), 2:1398.

[3] Ana Ágreda Pino and Carolina Naya Franco, "De Amadeo de Saboya a Beatriz Ximénez Cerdán: El pinjante relicario del Espíritu Santo donado al joyero del Pilar por la condesa de Contamina y marquesa de Bárboles (1695)," *Sarmental: Estudios de Historia del Arte y Patrimonio*, no. 1 (2022): 181–190.

The eldest, María de los Dolores, was born at Alhama de Granada in 1761 and travelled to Quito with her family after her father's appointment. There, in the capital of the *Audiencia*, her father secured for her an advantageous marriage to Manuel Valenzuela de las Mayllas, whom she wed on 18 August 1781 in the church of El Sagrario. He too was bound up with the administration of the Indies, rising to be director general of revenues in Bogotá and a member of the Royal Council of Finance,[4] and he bore the title of seventh Conde de la Puebla de los Valles.[5] Josefa de las Angustias, for her part, was born at Úbeda in 1763 and was likewise married in Quito, in 1784, the year after the portrait under discussion, to Juan José de Villalengua y Marfil,[6] a senior official who had served as protector of the Indians of Quito (1773), *fiscal del crimen*, or crown prosecutor in criminal causes, of Quito (1776) and fiscal del crimen of the Real Audiencia of Lima (1781). To this Lima period belongs the portrait now preserved by the Discalced Carmelites of Antequera (fig. 6).[7]

Villalengua was appointed president of the Audiencia when his father-in-law, Don José García de León y Pizarro, returned to the Peninsula, and he carried out important public works in the spirit of the Enlightenment, among them the paving of the streets, the whitewashing of every house front and the introduction of a system of refuse collection.[8] He was later appointed regent of the *Audiencia* of Guatemala and, only eight days afterwards, received the honours of the Council of the Indies. In 1791 he was admitted to the Royal Order of Charles III, and three years later he was named to the Council of the Indies as a *ministro togado*, one of its lawyer-councillors, once again with his father-in-law's help. He reached Cádiz in March 1796 and held the post until his retirement on 16 May 1800.

The two daughters are therefore far from marginal figures in the family's history, for their marriages show clearly how relations among the families of the monarchy's senior officials were structured, and how those networks were perpetuated between Spain and America.

Last comes the portrait of the youngest child, his father's namesake, on whom there is ample documentation, including his own memoirs. In them he acknowledges that he was born in Madrid only by circumstance, in the calle de la Espada, on 19 October 1770, while his mother was at court seeking advancement for her husband, who had remained at Jerez, then following the so-called *carrera de varas*, the career of the

[4] Eric Beerman, "Pizarro," *Revista de Historia Naval 8*, no. 31 (1990): 43.
[5] The couple's daughter, María de los Dolores Valenzuela y Pizarro, had artistic leanings: she is even known to have exhibited a drawing of a head when she was only thirteen. See Roberto González-Ramos, "Nobles, damas y diletantes en las exposiciones de la Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando (1793–1808)," *Arte, Individuo y Sociedad 32*, no. 2 (2020): 414.
[6] Mark A. Burkholder and Donald S. Chandler, *Biographical Dictionary of Audiencia Ministers in the Americas, 1687–1821* (London: Greenwood Press, 1982), 357.
[7] Mario Segovia Portillo, "De Perú y Nueva Granada: Lienzos enrollables americanos en las Carmelitas Descalzas de Antequera," *Atrio: Revista de Historia del Arte 30* (2024): 90–111.
[8] Federico González Suárez, *Historia general de la República del Ecuador*, vol. 5 (*Quito: Imprenta del Clero*, 1891), 324–325.

crown's magistrates in the towns.[9] His testimony once again brings to the fore the active part played by the women of the family in the political circles of the day.

Unlike his sisters, who married in Quito and followed their husbands' careers in the Americas, the boy, who appears beside his father in the hospital canvas already mentioned (fig. 1), returned to the Peninsula, where he made his career within the political and administrative apparatus of the monarchy. In 1789 he entered the University of Alcalá de Henares, which, together with the family's good connections, opened the way to a precocious diplomatic career. It began in the First Secretariat of State, the ministry responsible for foreign affairs, and at barely twenty he was sent abroad: first to Berlin, from 1790 to 1792; then to the Spanish embassy in Vienna; to Paris in 1797, on a diplomatic mission; and finally back to Vienna in 1798–1799. From 1802 he served as secretary of the Council of State until the Napoleonic invasion of 1808, when he took the patriot side. He then held important offices, among them that of Secretary of the Interior for the Peninsula and Adjacent Islands, and after the restoration of the monarchy he became Secretary of State (Secretario de Estado y del Despacho), an office broadly equivalent to that of a present-day prime minister. In that post it fell to him to handle major diplomatic questions, such as relations with the European powers after the war and, above all, the process of emancipation of the American territories. In 1818 he fell from favour amid the intrigue surrounding the purchase of Russian ships, intended for service on the American front but found to be unfit for use, and he was sent to Valencia, far from the centres of power. With the *Trienio Liberal* (1820–1823) he returned to the political stage, but was again set aside and left for France, whence he returned after the king's release at Cádiz; he nevertheless met with fresh difficulties and further periods of exile, and could not return to Madrid for good until 1832. The last years of his life brought a measure of rehabilitation, and in 1834 he was named *Prócer del Reino*, a member of the new upper chamber.[10] He died in Madrid on 27 January 1835. The descendants of his uncle Ramón preserve a portrait of him in maturity (fig. 7), dated 1813 and painted by Ángel de Saavedra, Duke of Rivas, who was a writer, soldier and politician as well as a painter.[11]

The only painting in the series to bear a signature is that of the youngest member of the family, Don José García de León y Pizarro y Jiménez de Frías. In the lower left corner it reads: "Visente Alban pinxit à. 1783". In his *Historia del Reino de Quito* (1789), Juan de Velasco places the "maestro Albán, natural de Quito" (Master Albán, a native of Quito) among the most celebrated artists of his time, a judgement that has endured to the present day.[12] Although Velasco does not make clear whether he was referring to Vicente (active 1767–1796) or to his brother, the painter Francisco Albán

[9] José García de León y Pizarro, *Memorias*, ed. Álvaro Alonso-Castrillo (Madrid, 1943), 7–12.
[10] The Senate preserves his personal file, together with the documents relating to his appointment, admission and parliamentary activity: Senado de España, Archivo, "El Senado entre 1834 y 1923," Senadores, "García de León y Pizarro, José."
[11] José Rafael Rojas Suárez and Rosana de Andrés Díaz, *Ministerio del Interior: Dos siglos de historia* (Madrid: Ministerio del Interior, Gobierno de España, 2015), 31.
[12] Juan de Velasco, *Historia del Reino de Quito en la América Meridional*, vol. 3 (*Quito: Casa de la Cultura Ecuatoriana*, 1979), 128.

(1742–1788), it seems logical to think of the former, the more significant of the two, who received the most important commissions, such as the one under discussion.

The preference of the governors of Quito for Vicente is indeed attested on other occasions, as when President Luis Muñoz de Guzmán commissioned from him an ex-voto in honour of the Virgin of El Quinche for the miraculous cure of his wife. He was also chosen as portraitist by the highest religious authority of the *Audiencia*, Bishop Blas Manuel Sobrino y Minayo (fig. 8), whose likeness he likewise took in 1783, so that the picture is strictly contemporary with the secular series under study.

Vicente Albán was also the painter entrusted with the celebrated series of six canvases of popular types and plant species native to the Kingdom of Quito, which were subsequently sent to Madrid for the *Real Gabinete de Historia Natural*, the Royal Cabinet of Natural History (fig. 9). Now in the Museo de América, they reflect the scientific interests of the age.[13] This series, too, was painted in 1783, which probably makes that year the high point of his career.

Finally, his oeuvre also includes works of religious subject matter: the *Calvary*, signed and dated 1780, in the Museo Jijón y Caamaño in Quito, and a number of works for export that he sent to the region of present-day Colombia, such as the *Saint Jerome* and the *Saint Augustine* in the Museo de Arte Religioso in Popayán (1785 and c. 1788), the Immaculate Conception in the convent of San Francisco in Cali (1787) and the *Ecce Homo* in the cathedral of Barichara.[14]

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[13] Ángel Justo Estebaranz, Paula Martín Rodríguez and Francisco Javier Salgueiro González, “La representación de especies vegetales en la pintura quiteña del siglo XVIII,” in *Pintura, poder, sociedad y naturaleza en el Quito barroco,* ed. Ángel Justo Estebaranz (Seville: Editorial Universidad de Sevilla, 2024), 301–321.
[14] Adrián Contreras-Guerrero and Laura Liliana Vargas Murcia, “La pintura quiteña del siglo XVIII en Colombia,” in Justo Estebaranz, *Pintura, poder, sociedad y naturaleza en el Quito barroco*, 251–284.



Fig. 1: *José Cortés de Alcocer, Visit of Don José García de León y Pizarro to the Hospital of San Juan de Dios, Quito*, 1778–1784, oil on canvas, 345 × 327 cm (135 7/8 × 128 3/4 in.), Hospital Eugenio Espejo, Quito



Fig. 2: José Cortés de Alcocer, *Don José García de León y Pizarro Offers the Kingdom of Quito to Charles III*, 1784, oil on copper, oval, 54 × 45 cm (21 1/4 × 17 3/4 in.), private collection, Madrid



Fig. 3: Vicente Albán, *Portrait of Doña Micaela María Jiménez de Frías y Pizarro* (detail), 1783, oil on canvas



Fig. 4: Anonymous Spanish goldsmith, *Holy Spirit Pendant*, seventeenth century, gold, diamonds and enamel, 30 x 50 mm, Instituto Valencia de Don Juan, Madrid, inv. 1076



Fig. 5: Ignacio María Barreda, *Portrait of Doña Juana María Romero*, 1794, oil on canvas, Museo Nacional de Historia, Castillo de Chapultepec, Mexico City



Fig. 6: Anonymous painter active in Lima, *Portrait of Juan José de Villalengua y Marfil*, 1781–1784, oil on canvas mounted on a roller (*lienzo enrollable*), 185 × 135 cm (72 7/8 × 53 1/8 in.), Convento de las Carmelitas Descalzas, Antequera



Fig. 7: Ángel de Saavedra, Duke of Rivas, *Portrait of José García de León y Pizarro y Jiménez de Frías*, 1813, oil on canvas, collection of the Marqués de Casa Pizarro



Fig. 8: Vicente Albán, *Portrait of Bishop Blas Manuel Sobrino y Minayo*, 1783, oil on canvas, 105.5 × 76 cm (41 1/2 × 29 7/8 in.), Museo de América, Madrid



Fig. 9: Vicente Albán, *Noblewoman with Her Black Slave (Señora principal con su negra esclava),* 1783, oil on canvas, 80 × 109 cm (31 1/2 × 42 7/8 in.), Museo de América, Madrid, inv. 00073











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