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Vicente López Portaña
Antonia Alcoba Mateos, Marquessa de Casa Gaviria,
1845.

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VICENTE LÓPEZ PORTAÑA

(Valencia 1772 – Madrid 1850)

ANTONIA ALCOPA MATEOS, MARQUESA DE CASA GAVIRIA

1845

Oil on canvas.

128 x 97 cm; 50 3/8 x 38 1/4 in.

Signed "V.^{te} Lopez f.^o 1845," lower left.

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.

Literature

Aguilera, E.M., *Vicente López*, Madrid 1946, p. 21, lám. 38;

Díez García, J.L., *Retratos privados en la pintura española del siglo XIX* in *Tesoros de las colecciones particulares madrileñas: Pinturas españolas del Romanticismo al Modernismo*, exhibition catalogue, Madrid 1991, p. 55;

Díez García, J.L., *Vicente López (1772-1850) Catálogo Razonado*, Madrid 1999, p. 116, P-460, lám. 264;

Díez García, J.L., *Vicente López (1772-1850) Vida y Obra*, Madrid 1999, p. 354, P-460; [366]

Lafuente Ferrari, E., *Breve Historia de la Pintura Española*, Madrid 1946, ed. 1953, p. 438;

Monreal y Tejada, L., *Casa Bertrán en San Gervasio*, Barcelona 1985, p. 88, p. 131, n° 40;

Morales y Marín, J.L., *Vicente López*, Zaragoza 1980, p. 102, n° 269;

Ossorio y Bernard, M., *Galería biográfica de artistas españoles del Siglo XIX*, Madrid 1883-4, p. 390.

Exhibitions

Liceo Artístico y Literario, Madrid, June 1846;

Vicente López. Palacio de la Virreina, Barcelona, 1943 (n° 30).

Tesoros de las colecciones particulares madrileñas: pinturas españolas del romanticismo al modernismo, Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando, Madrid, October - November 1991.

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

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Seated beside a window, the sitter wears a gown of blue-black velvet trimmed with white lace and a profusion of jewellery. Her right hand holds a closed fan and is gloved in white, finished with a bow, while her left, ungloved, holds both the removed glove and a lace-edged handkerchief. A floral white handkerchief is laid across the back of the chair. Behind her, a red curtain gives way to an architectural setting lost in half-shadow, with an open window at her right.

The portrait is a pendant to that of the sitter's husband, *Manuel Gaviria y Douza, Marqués de Casa Gaviria* (fig. 1), painted by López the same year and today in a private collection. The two sitters are deliberately posed facing one another to balance their placement as a pair. Their evident taste for ostentation situates both portraits somewhere between the private bourgeois portrait and the portrait of state. They can be read as a display of status befitting a family whose fortunes, in this same year, stood on the brink of a still grander ascent. Their son, later II Marqués de Casa Gaviria, would within the year begin work on the Palacio de Gaviria on Calle Arenal, where this portrait would come to hang alongside those of her husband and son. The pair was later exhibited together at the Liceo Artístico y Literario in June 1846, and the husband's likeness was cited two years later by Gutiérrez de la Vega, in one of the earliest published accounts of López's late work.

The Gaviria were a Sevillian family whose rise to the highest ranks of Isabelline society was remarkably swift. Until 1840, when the marquesado de Casa Gaviria was granted, the family held no title at all. Within little more than a decade, they had become bankers to the Crown, builders of one of Madrid's grandest private palaces, and hosts to the queen herself. Alongside the family's later ventures in banking and finance, their wealth rested on maintaining one of Spain's most celebrated fighting-bull ranches, ranked in 1841 at the Valencia fair second only to that of the Duque de Veragua, an enterprise that, like the sitter's own jewels and velvet, spoke as much to old Andalusian landed wealth as to the new fortunes of Isabelline Madrid.

Díez singles out the present portrait as especially fine, praising the truly striking intensity of the sitter's almost masculine features, captured with an almost Riberesque realism, and the splendid quality with which every detail of her dress and jewellery is resolved. This vein of unsparing naturalism, rooted in the Valencian tradition of Ribalta and Ribera that López absorbed in his youth, sits somewhat awkwardly beside his reputation as an essentially academic painter in the line of Mengs and Maella. Critics have tended to emphasise the latter inheritance at the expense of the former, even though it is precisely this substratum of direct observation that gives his late sitters their startling physical presence, nowhere more visible than in a portrait such as this, and quite apart from the polish of technique for which he is more conventionally praised.

A preparatory study of the sitter's head is recorded (fig. 2), part of a working method considered to have been relatively usual for López, though few such preparatory studies survive today. Painted when López was seventy-three, the portrait is counted among the most romantically intense of his late career, a claim borne out by other works from the same year. The bust-length portrait of *Vicente de Escofet y Febrer de la Torre* (fig. 3), of striking modernity and quivering Romantic feeling, would be difficult

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to reconcile with the notion, often repeated, that López's art barely evolved over the course of his long career. The *Marquesa de Sentmenat* (fig. 4), meanwhile, is widely regarded as the most original of all his female portraits, distinguished in pose, bearing and technical refinement from everything he had painted before it, so much so that some scholars, without real evidence, have wondered whether Federico de Madrazo had a hand in it. Coming in the same year as the present canvas, both works suggest that López's continued engagement with the artistic currents of his day was neither isolated nor incidental.

A further, curious detail concerns the picture's light. Although a window is represented at the sitter's right, the illumination in fact falls, upon close inspection, from the opposite side of the composition. The inconsistency suggests that, by this stage in his career, the half-drawn curtain and side window recurring so insistently across López's portraits of these years had become something closer to a decorative formula, repeated for its established association with genteel domestic interiors, than an environment observed and faithfully rendered from life.

Beyond the inventory of jewels and lace, or the genealogy of a rapidly ennobled family, it is finally the sitter's own bearing that furnishes the picture's testimony. A woman recorded at the precise hinge-point between the landed wealth of Andalusia and the financial ascendancy of Isabelline Madrid, sat for a portrait as assured as the fortune it was meant to announce.

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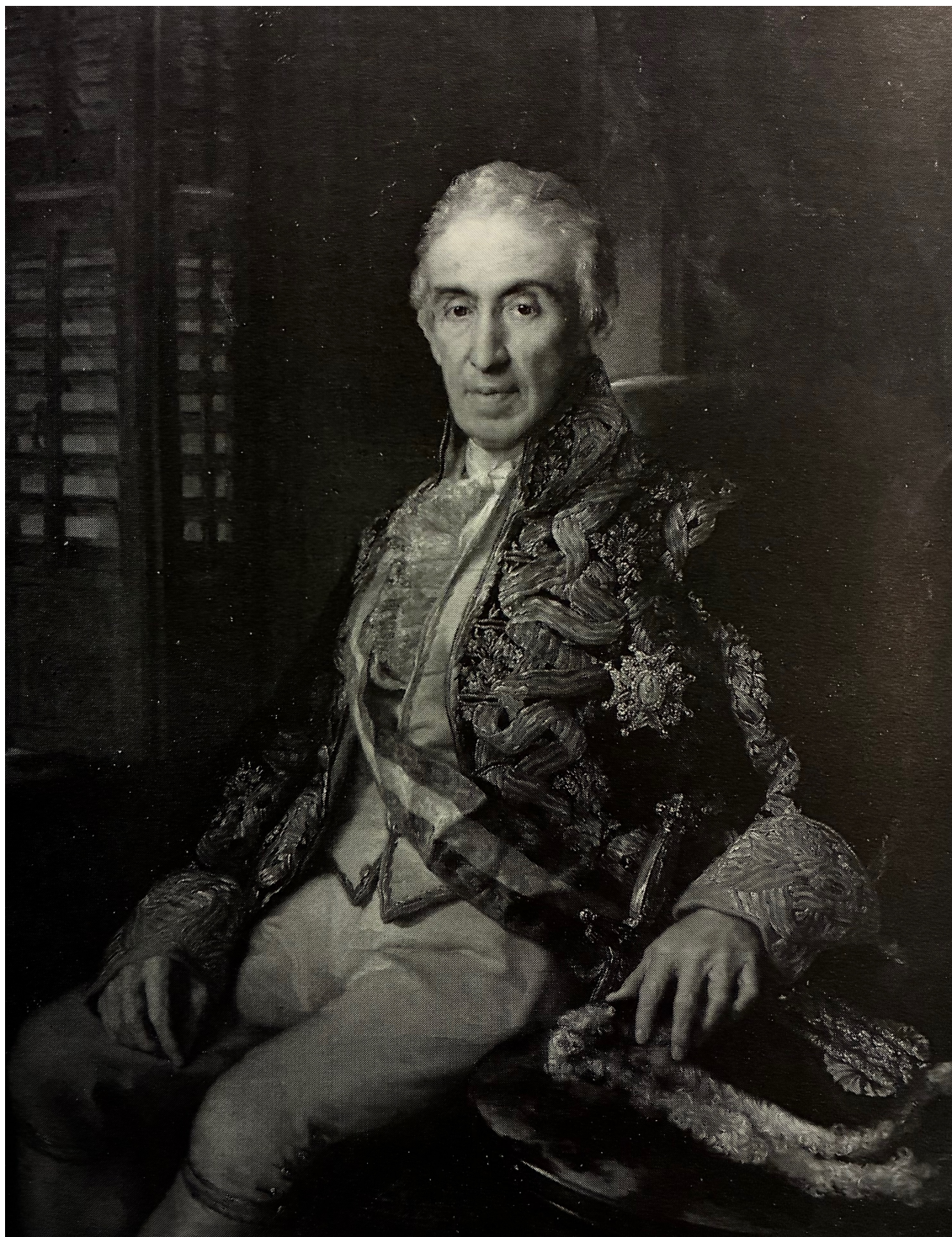


Fig. 1, Vicente López Portaña, *Manuel Gaviria y Douza, Marqués de Casa Gaviria*, 1845, oil on canvas, 128 x 97 cm, Private collection, Spain.

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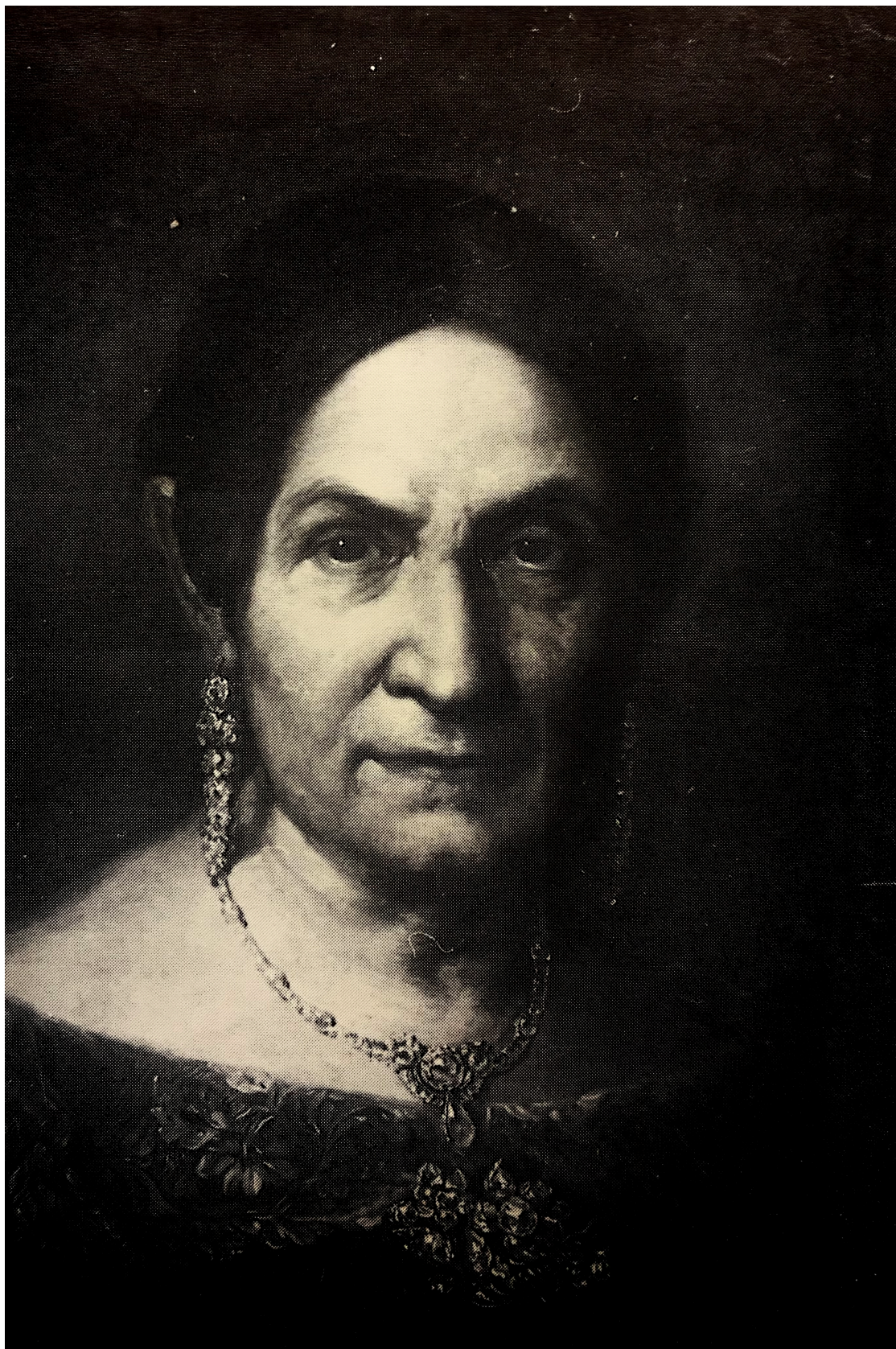


Fig. 2, Vicente López Portaña, *Antonia Alcoba Mateos, Marquessa de Casa Gaviria*, 1845, oil on canvas, 45 x 32 cm, Formerly in the Jiménez Collection.

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Fig. 3, Vicente López Portaño, *Vicente de Escofet y Febrer de la Torre*, 1845, oil on canvas, 81 x 65 cm, Private collection, Madrid.

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Fig. 4, Vicente López Portaña, *María Pilar Despujol, Marquesa de Sentmenat*, 1845, oil on canvas, 122 x 88 cm, Private collection, Barcelona.

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