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VICENTE LÓPEZ PORTAÑA

(VALENCIA, 1772–MADRID, 1850)

Allegory of Valencia

1800

PENCIL AND WASH / LAID PAPER. 270 × 124 MM

Vicente López was born in Valencia on September 19, 1772, and begins his training with Antonio de Villanueva in the Fine Arts Academy of San Carlos. In 1789 he is awarded the first prize of this institution for the painting *King Hezekiah flaunting his wealth* (Fine Arts Museum of Valencia San Pío V), assigned with a pension to study in Madrid. There, he continues his training in the Royal Academy of Fine Arts of San Fernando, assimilating the teachings of Mariano Salvador Maella, who influences him to sketching precise and detailed drawings and the baroque sense and color of his final compositions. Likewise, the direct contemplation of the frescoes of Luca Giordano and Corrado Giaquinto is essential to him to creating his esthetic language. After some years in Madrid, he returns to Valencia in 1792 with the aura of becoming well known in the Court. In the city of his birthplace he is commissioned numerous different types of work; outstanding is the *Allegory of Valencia* fresco commissioned in 1800 by the Town Council. After the War of Independence in 1814, Ferdinand VII requests the artist to come to the Court appointing him the year after, his First Court Painter and thus converting the artist in the most solicited painter of the time. It will be the portrait genre that provides him with the biggest recognition thanks to his direct and honest vision of its characters and his rich and luxurious treatment of the clothing and fabric. Among them it is worth highlighting the portrait of

Ferdinand VII with the Habit of the Golden Fleece (1831), for the Spanish Embassy before the Holy See, or *The Portrait of the painter Francisco de Goya y Lucientes* (1826), for the gallery of contemporary artists of the Prado Museum. In his capacity as director of decorative programs of the Royal Palace of Madrid in 1828, he paints for the vault of the «Pieza de Vestir» of Ferdinand VII, the *Allegory of the institution of the order of Charles III*. At the death of the monarch he will continue in the role of first court painter to the young queen Elizabeth II until his death on July 22, 1850¹.

As aforementioned already, Vicente López paints, in 1800 at his birthplace, the *Allegory of Valencia* for the vault of the central hall of the «Casa del Vestuario»; the present drawing is the preparatory sketch for this work and the first one of an allegorical nature for the painter. As indicated by José Luis Díez, the Town Council of the capital had decided in the general meeting on May 5, the decoration of the building, and upon conclusion for the month of October of that same year². The drawing, done in pencil and sepia ink wash, depicts in the center of the composition the banner with the coat of arms of Valencia held by a big group of angels and illuminated by an oil lamp that sustains the allegorical figure the Truth. At its right a big angel sustains the «L», symbol of the city's loyalty during the seige that it suffered in the war with Castilla, and on the left another one sustains



Vicente López Portaña,
Allegory of Valencia, 1800.
Valencia, Biblioteca
Popular (former Casa
del Vestuario)

a dog in allusion to the loyalty to the Crown of Aragón. In the upper area of the drawing, over the banner, a group of big angels sustain the Crown and the bat or “rat penat”, also symbols of the coat of arms of Valencia. On top is the scene of the allegory Fame, that carries in its hands the trumpet to announce the glory of the city. As a platform or base of this composition, in the bottom area appears the allegory

Abundance, that holds in a hand a sheaf of ear of wheat and in the other, a group of crowns and in this way spread abundance on Earth. Next to her, a big angel scatters a cornucopia of flowers. The whole scene takes place out in the open air, amidst the immensity.

The present drawing is the preliminary sketch for the fresco of the «Casa del Vestuario». Between the initial conception of the ceiling and the final work, Vicente López introduces some changes in his composition and in the details. Therefore, while in the drawing the figures open vanishing lines to the exterior based on marked diagonals, creating an open scene entirely dynamic, the fresco shows on the contrary, a more closed conception, with a circular format, where the figures appear as if suspended in the air but with lesser vitality. Another noticeable modification in the actual work is the substitution of some of the big angels from the sketch for adult angels with a feminine aspect, as well as the elimination of one of the angels that held the “rat penat” and that assisted in discovering the banner with the city’s coat of arms. This increases the sensation of gravity and stillness of the actual work contrasting with the freshness and lightness conveyed in the drawing.

As reference points for his composition, Vicente López uses the frescoes of Luca Giordano and Corrado Giaquinto, stated in the biography, and above all assumes the teachings of its principal mentor, Mariano Salvador Maella. Together with these, they have in common the predominance of the pastel shades, and the pompous and baroque scenery. These same characteristics are the ones that will appear in future compositions of an allegorical nature that he undertook for Ferdinand VII in the Royal Palace of Madrid.

1 For a more in-depth biography of this artist see: Ossorio y Bernard (1868), pp. 388-390 y Díez (1999).

2 Díez (1999), vol. II, p. 259, cat. no. F-25.

