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## JUAN MONTERO DE ROJAS (MADRID, c. 1613-1683)

### *The Dream of Saint Joseph*

c. 1668

PEN AND BLUE INK WASH WITH SQUARING-UP IN CHARCOAL, ON LAID PAPER

216 X 155 MM

The exact date of birth of the Madrid painter Juan Montero de Rojas is unknown but it must have been around 1613 to judge from the statement by Antonio Palomino, who noted that he died "in this city in 1683 at the age of seventy."<sup>1</sup> Montero de Rojas first trained in the studio of Pedro de las Cuevas<sup>2</sup> where he coincided with Francisco Camilo, Antonio de Pereda and Juan Carreño de Miranda. At an unknown date he left for Italy, according to Palomino, to broaden his studies. There "he achieved success and many of his works were thought to be by the hand of Caravaggio."<sup>3</sup> While it is not known for certain where he lived in Italy most experts are inclined to believe Ceán Bermúdez's statement that he was in Rome<sup>4</sup> where he gained first-hand knowledge of the prevailing classicism of the day as well as of the work of Caravaggio's followers. It is not known when Montero de Rojas returned to Madrid as the first documentary references date from 1664 when his name appears in the will of Francisco Camilo. In 1673 after the death of Camilo his name again appears as an executor. Over the following years Montero de Rojas's name reappears in disputes in which he supports the noble status of painting. Little more is known of the artist's life other than that he died in Madrid on 27 November 1683.<sup>5</sup>

Few works by Montero de Rojas have survived to the present day. Lost works include *The Assumption of the Virgin*

Painted for the ceiling of Nuestra Señora de Atocha, "which is among the finest works that he has produced".<sup>6</sup> With regard to surviving paintings, the earliest is a *Saint Joseph* (private collection) of 1668, while also dating from that period is *The Dream of Saint Joseph* painted for the Mercedarias de Don Juan de Alarcón (Madrid). Both reveal the influence of Caravaggesque naturalism as interpreted by Ribera. Among Montero de Rojas's last works are *The Crossing of the Red Sea* and an episode from the life of Saint Augustine (both Museo del Prado). They reveal the artist's evolution towards a high Baroque style.

This previously unpublished drawing depicts the episode of *The Dream of Saint Joseph*. It is executed in pen and blue ink wash and is squared-up in charcoal, indicating that it was intended to be transferred to canvas. The technique is similar to that used for the only known drawing by Montero de Rojas other than this one, an *Immaculate Conception* in the Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid (Sig. Dib. 15/3/4), signed with the monogram "M. T. R".<sup>7</sup>

The present drawing is set in an interior. On the right is the sleeping Saint Joseph, seated and leaning on his carpenter's bench. In the centre is a celestial group in which the principal figure is a descending angel that rests its hands on the saint's shoulders while announcing to him the forthcoming birth of his son. On the left, in a



Juan Montero de Rojas, *The Dream of Saint Joseph*. Madrid, convent of the Mercedarias de Don Juan de Alarcón



Juan Montero de Rojas, *Immaculate Conception*. Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional

secondary position and drawn in a more sketchy manner, is the birth of Christ. Through what seems to be an open door we see the seated Virgin, rocking a cradle with the Infant Christ in it.

The present sketch can be related to the painting of *The Dream of Saint Joseph* that Montero de Rojas executed for the convent of the Mercedarias de Don Juan de Alarcón in Madrid. Nonetheless, while it is essentially very similar with regard to the composition of the final work, there are some differences between the drawing and the canvas. The most significant ones are the fact that the drawing is in the opposite direction to the painting and that the background

scene in the painting depicts the Incarnation of the Virgin in contrast to this drawing, which has a scene of the Virgin and Child. Interestingly, if the Madrid painting is compared to a canvas by Mateo Gilarte (c. 1625-1675) in Murcia cathedral it is immediately evident that the two compositions are identical. The two artists probably based themselves on the same print when devising their scenes.<sup>8</sup> Other than the small angels at the top of the two paintings, no other differences are evident. The present drawing may not be a preparatory study for the canvas in Madrid but rather a second version executed by Montero de Rojas for a work that has either not survived or was finally not produced.

1 Palomino (1715-1724/1947), p. 1010.

2 See García López (2008), p. 275 and Palomino (1715-1724/1947), p. 1010.

3 Palomino (1715-1724/1947), p. 1010, and Angulo and Pérez Sánchez (1983), p. 108.

4 Ceán Bermúdez (1800), vol. III, p. 176.

5 On the artist, see Angulo and Pérez Sánchez (1983), pp. 108-115; and Pérez Sánchez (1996), pp. 251-252.

6 As stated by Lázaro Díaz del Valle. See García López (2008), p. 275.

7 Barcia (1906), p. 90.

8 Angulo and Pérez Sánchez (1983), p. 113.

