

A MASTERPIECE OF

Vasco Pereira Lusitano

«VIRGEN DEL BUEN AIRE»

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Vasco Pereira Lusitano (Lisbon, c. 1536/1537-Seville, 1609)

Virgen del Buen Aire

1603

Oil on canvas

189 × 135 cm

Permanent loan, Private Collection, 2020

A generous permanent loan made recently by Mme Odile Pereira and M. Armando Pereira enables us, for the next five years, to show visitors to Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, one of the finest works by Vasco Pereira Lusitano (1536/7-1609), a Portuguese painter who settled in Seville. The *Nuestra Señora del Buen Aire*, dated 1603, originally belonged to the collection of the Viscounts of Palma. It is a magnificent composition in which the Virgin Mary appears between St. Joseph and St. Anne, surrounded by Saints and the Magi, mirroring the evolution of the painter himself, who, in this picture, brings together various elements that he learned during his apprenticeship with the Italianate Sevillian artist, Luis de Vargas, and mixes them with the decorative exuberance of Flemish mannerism.

The *Virgen del Buen Aire* was painted for the church of the eponymous brotherhood, in the city's Triana quarter, which became a centre of activity for the pilots, captains and owners of the ships that were engaged in constant trade with North and South America. Founded in the first half of the sixteenth century, this brotherhood or the "University of Seafarers", as it was also known, is mentioned in documents from 1555 onwards, being installed next to the River Guadalquivir in a church and hospital inaugurated in 1573, which remained the brotherhood's headquarters until 1704, when it was moved to the Real Colégio de San Telmo. According to its foundational statutes, endorsed by the Archbishop of Seville in 1561 and 1562, and by King Philip II in 1579, the aim of this brotherhood was to tend to the welfare of seafarers, offering protection and charitable assistance to the poor pensioners, orphans and daughters of navigators, and ransoming sailors taken hostage by pirates or enemy nations. As much of the wealth of Seville, which, at that time, was the largest city in the Peninsula, derived from its trade with America, it is easy to understand

the importance of this work by Vasco Pereira. The painting continued in the brotherhood's possession until 1845, when it became part of the collection of the Viscounts of Palma, in Palma do Condado (Huelva), remaining in the family until recently.

VASCO PEREIRA LUSITANO

Vasco Pereira was born in Lisbon, between the years 1536 and 1537, probably originating from a family that had its roots in Évora, as he himself mentions in one of his works. He studied painting in Seville with one of the most important Italianate painters of the mid-sixteenth century, Luis de Vargas (1502/6-1567), who was also the master that taught Francisco Venegas, a Sevillian painter who later settled in Lisbon. Pereira had already left the Vargas workshop before 1562, the year when, now working autonomously, he produced the painting of *St. Sebastian* in the Church of Santa Maria de la O in Sanlúcar de Barrameda, the earliest work that he is known to have painted. This painter's activity is also documented by other works, such as the predella of the *Nativity* at Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga, dating from 1575, the *Annunciation* of the Church of San Juan Bautista in Marchena, *St. Onofrius* at Dresden Museum (1583), painted for a chapel of the Pátio de los Naranjos of Seville Cathedral, or the *Virgin and Child with Musician Angels*, now housed at Museu Carlos Machado (1604) and originating from the Jesuit College of Ponta Delgada (Azores). One of the best Sevillian masters of his generation and certainly the most important Portuguese painter to have settled abroad in the second half of the sixteenth century, Vasco Pereira was, like other artists from Seville, a highly cultured painter, with an enormous collection of prints and a library that contained 241 books, an unusually large number of works for someone without a university education. In 1599, he was elected as the head of the Guild of Seville Painters, which afforded him a highly prominent status among the local masters. At that time, his leading position could only be disputed by Alonso



Vázquez, with whom he did, in fact, collaborate artistically, and Francisco Pacheco, a cultured painter and the father-in-law of Velázquez. Vasco Pereira was himself the founder of an artistic lineage that, passing through his son-in-law, led all the way to Murillo.

Besides adding yet another important work by this Portuguese-born master to the museum's collection, the painting that is now exhibited at the MNAA enables us to include a rare example in our collections of Sevillian Late Mannerism, which, shortly afterwards, opened up Spanish painting to the beginnings of the Naturalism of the Golden Age. It is certainly one of the best works painted by Vasco Pereira, notable not only for its composition of a large group of figures, but also for the exuberance of the fabrics, jewels and gold pieces that it shows, affording a formal and decorative richness to the painting that heralds the arrival of the Baroque.

Museu Nacional de Arte Antiga wishes to express its profound gratitude to the owners of the work, Mme Odile Pereira and M. Armando Pereira, for making this generous permanent loan of the painting at the museum, and we should also like to extend our thanks to Dr. João Magalhães, of Sotheby's in London, for having helped to make this permanent loan possible.

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