



# LA COPIA Y SUS USOS EN LA PINTURA TARDOGÓTICA

Tiempo, memoria e identidad

*THE COPY AND ITS USES  
IN LATE GOTHIC PAINTING*

*Time, Memory and Identity*

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## ÍNDICE

### *Introducción*

Olga PÉREZ MONZÓN, Matilde MIQUEL JUAN, Miriam BUESO MANZANAS y Víctor Daniel LÓPEZ LORENTE.....	13
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### *Introduction*

Olga PÉREZ MONZÓN, Matilde MIQUEL JUAN, Miriam BUESO MANZANAS y Víctor Daniel LÓPEZ LORENTE.....	19
---	----

### *Learning, memory and collecting practice:*

#### *The copy and its uses in Hispanic Late Gothic*

Olga PÉREZ MONZÓN .....	21
-------------------------	----

#### *Perpetuating the image of the queen: portraits of Isabella I of Castile*

Carmen GARCÍA-FRÍAS CHECA .....	61
---------------------------------	----

#### *The Identification of Three Portraits by Michel Sittow. Opening Hypothesis*

Carmen VEGA .....	97
-------------------	----

#### *Una copia de Petrus Christus en Hormaza (Burgos)*

Pilar VIDAL MELER.....	127
------------------------	-----

#### *“Según e en la manera que está debuxada”.*

#### *Réplicas y emulaciones en la arquitectura de la Baja Edad Media*

Víctor Daniel LÓPEZ LORENTE.....	147
----------------------------------	-----

#### *Successful artistic models during the first globalization (15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries)*

Iban REDONDO PARÉS .....	169
--------------------------	-----

#### *Deciphering material reality layer by layer: Application of non-invasive techniques for the identification of gypsum in preparation layers*

Inmaculada DONATE CARRETERO; Ana Rosa GARCÍA PÉREZ; Beatriz MAYANS ZAMORA .....	197
--	-----

<i>El Museo Lázaro Galdiano y la copia en las pinturas de los siglos XV y XVI</i> Amparo LÓPEZ REDONDO .....	219
<i>De mazonerías y follajes tudescos a artesones romanos.</i> <i>El léxico ornamental como elemento de identidad y de linaje (siglos XV-XVI)</i> Raúl ROMERO MEDINA .....	253
<i>Resúmenes</i> .....	277

## LEARNING, MEMORY AND COLLECTING PRACTICE: THE COPY AND ITS USES IN HISPANIC LATE GOTHIC<sup>1</sup>

Olga PÉREZ MONZÓN

Mary of Hungary (1505-1548), the sister of Emperor Charles V and an exquisite art collector, was one of the first owners of the celebrated *Descent from the Cross* by Rogier van der Weyden (c. 1435. Museo del Prado. Madrid). Vicente Álvarez referred to it in the following terms in 1548:

“... It seems that [the *Descent from the Cross*] was in Louvain, and that Queen Mary had it fetched and replaced it with a copy almost as good as the original, but not quite... It is the best picture in the whole castle, and in my view, even the whole world, since I have seen many good paintings in these regions but none to equal this for naturalness and devotion. All those who have seen it are of the same opinion...”<sup>2</sup>

The testimony of the Spaniard in his famous *Relación del viaje que el príncipe Felipe de España hizo a los Países Bajos* (Account of the journey made by Prince Philip of Spain to the Low Countries) confirms data that form part of the artistic historiography of the Flemish master's work: its location in the chapel of the palace of Binche (Belgium), the noblewoman's residence, prominent for the artistry of both the building and its content; its original provenance in Louvain as a result of a commission from the city's brotherhood of crossbowmen; and its replacement by a similar copy of inferior quality.

Álvarez's periegesis corroborates two facts of importance for the subject that concerns us. The first is the aesthetic appreciation of this type of painting by contemporaries, and the other is the common use of the copy at that period. This praxis can clearly be extended to the whole of the late mediaeval period, and derives from the copy's accredited functions as a tool for learning at artistic workshops, for the recognition of the authorship of a master or a celebrated work, and as a sort of label or code of identity for a collection.

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2 Quoted by Silva, 1998: 351. For more data, see Pérez Silva, 2020.

may have remained in the family as one of its most prized possessions. In this respect, its assignation to the Infantado branch would have been logical. In any case, the desire to reproduce this prototype with greater or lesser *variatio* in places traditionally associated with the lineage (the chapel of Nuestra Señora de Afuera), memorials (the Luna chapel) or the different branches of the family (the *Tendilla Virgin*) clearly points to a referential value for the work.<sup>77</sup> Such practice would allow us to understand copies as a sort of hallmark of a collection, a family allusion, a personal identifying sign or another instrument in the geopolitical politics of the noble house.

We continue to research in this direction, both in the analysis of works and in the definition of these visual codes, which became better and more clearly established in the following centuries. This can be seen in two seventeenth-century works which will allow us to bring this study to a close.

The first is the painting of *The Sight* (1618, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid) by Jan Brueghel the Elder, an allegory of vision included in the series on the Five Senses that was presented as a gift by the city of Antwerp to its governors, the Archduke Albert and Archduchess Isabella Clara Eugenia. The composition uses a palatial setting full of collected objects and paintings of different formats, sizes and subject matter.<sup>78</sup> In general, collecting is exalted as one of the qualities of a good governor, but that is not all. Among the paintings represented, we can recognise some that formed part of the princely collection, such as Bosch's *Temptations of Saint Antony*. This citation particularises a fondness for collecting, specifies the Archduke's collection and advertises it through some of its most outstanding pieces.

This visual resource was made axiomatic by Leopold Wilhelm with the *Cabinet Paintings* he commissioned from David Teniers (1610-1690).<sup>79</sup> The Archduke, a renowned art connoisseur and the owner of a notable gallery, decided to aid its diffusion through these curious paintings where the same principles operate. The nobleman acts as master of ceremonies and proudly exhibits his picture collection, distributed around a room packed with panels and canvases reproduced to scale with the name of the artist written on their respective frames. All is painstakingly exact. But to what end? Leopold Wilhelm sent each of these cabinet paintings to the leading princely collectors in Europe with the single-minded purpose of promoting the wealth and quality of his painting collection, displaying his good taste and thereby emphasising his virtues as a governor. In a way, this is a sophistication of practices encountered on a lesser scale in the late Gothic period<sup>80</sup>.

77 In the collection of Burgos Cathedral, there is another low-quality copy of the *Durán Madonna* that probably dates from the sixteenth century. We are currently working on this piece, which may have belonged to the family of the Condesables, linked to the Mendozas through the marriage of Mencía de Mendoza, daughter of the Marquis of Santillana.

78 Wezel, 2000: 186.

79 Royo Villanova, Díaz Padrón, 1992.

80 English translation by Philip Sutton.