

*The Cristos yacentes of Gregorio Fernández: Polychrome Sculptures of the Supine Christ in Seventeenth-Century Spain.* Ilenia Colón Mendoza.

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Among the most striking religious imagery of the Spanish Baroque is the polychrome sculptural type known as the *Cristo yacente* — the recumbent, or supine, Christ. Ilenia Colón Mendoza examines the iconography, patronage, and function of this uniquely Spanish artistic phenomenon by focusing on the *Cristos* by Gregorio Fernández, the Valladolid-based carver who — epitomizing the notion of the “divinely selected” (83) and mystically inspired artist — popularized and came to be identified with this figural type in the seventeenth century. The book comprises four chapters and two appendixes in which materials, techniques, and matters of attribution and display are discussed in detail: a catalogue of works by Fernández and his workshop, and an inventory of sculptures of this type created in Valladolid by other artists, both of particular relevance for future research.

In the first two chapters, centered on iconographic and formal precedents, the author persuasively establishes the *Cristo yacente* as a devotional and Eucharistic figure by

drawing comparisons to Italian, Northern European (including an interesting print by Hieronymous Wierix), and, most significantly, Spanish sixteenth-century models. Dependent upon but fundamentally contrasting with other images of the Passion, the supine Christ is an isolated figure, usually kept within cloistered walls and often presented within vitrines recalling the holy sepulcher. Being separated from a narrative context allows for a multiplicity of readings and incites a greater connection with the viewer, who is strategically encouraged to contemplate Christ's wounds and reflect upon his human incarnation and Eucharistic significance, whether in the intimate and "experience-enhancing" (101) setting of a private chapel, at the base of *retablos*, or in the public realm of processional reenactments.

Discussed in chapter 2, Gaspar Becerra's expressive Christ for the royal convent of the Descalzas Reales in Madrid (ca. 1563), which functioned as a reliquary for the Eucharistic Host, constitutes a key transition from previous entombment groups, such as Juan de Juni's (1539–44) and Fernández's isolated *Cristos yacentes*, and in essence represents the first significant example of this sculptural type. In light of recent studies such as those by Felipe Pereda, Maxime Deurbergue, and Cynthia Robinson, the reader is left wondering whether the religious controversies that surrounded representations of the Passion of Christ in late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Spain may shed light into the reasons for this transformation at this particular moment in Spanish history. Additionally, a nuanced discussion of the *Sacramentum Amoris Austraci* — the Habsburgs' traditional devotion to the Eucharist — which the author compellingly but only cursorily connects to Becerra's and a number of Fernández's sculptures, should have played a more central role in a book that attempts to offer "the critical and socio-historical implications of these sculptures" (1).

The two last chapters, focused on the stylistic development and religious function of Fernández's *Cristos yacentes*, demonstrate the continued royal patronage (Philip III and his *valido*, the Duke of Lerma, commissioned several examples) and increasing public role of these sculptures in the seventeenth century. However, the issue of "how and why Fernández and his patrons at times manipulated the content and form of these images of Christ, in conjunction with the religious literature of their time" (6) remains unclear. In chapter 3, the author only mentions in passing significant variations of display such as that presented in Fernández's Christ for the royal convent of La Encarnación in Madrid (1620–25), in which the sculpture interacts with a painting representing the Virgin, Saint John, and Mary Magdalene, missing a rare opportunity to discuss the well-known *paragone* between painting and sculpture in a Spanish context. Similarly, the author's selection of mystical writers in chapter 4, mainly based on the books recorded in the inventory of Fernández's collaborator, the painter Diego Valentín Díaz, is unnecessarily limiting.

Combining private and public devotion, royal patronage and mass appeal, liturgical meaning, and artistic self-referentiality (here ascribed to the artist's presumed identification with Nicodemus, who, according to legend, carved the primordial image of the dead Christ), Fernández's *Cristos yacentes* exemplify the rich connotations that polychrome

sculpture evoked in early modern Spain. Building upon previous research, Colón Mendoza's reasonably well-illustrated book, the only comprehensive study of the supine Christ in English, draws renewed attention to some of these issues, and despite its limitations, is a welcome addition to the growing scholarship on early modern Spanish religious imagery.

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