

## Cristóbal de Villalpando: Mexican Painter of the Baroque

Culture 2017-08-03 08:38:10

New York City, NY - Cristóbal de Villalpando (ca. 1649–1714) emerged in the 1680s not only as the leading painter in viceregal Mexico, but also as one of the most innovative and accomplished artists in the entire Spanish world. Opening July 25 at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, the exhibition ***Cristóbal de Villalpando: Mexican Painter of the Baroque*** features his earliest masterpiece, a monumental painting depicting the biblical accounts of Moses and the brazen serpent and the Transfiguration of Jesus that was painted in 1683 for a chapel in Puebla Cathedral. Newly conserved, this 28-foot-tall canvas has never been exhibited outside its place of origin. Ten additional works, most of which have never been shown in the United States, will also be exhibited. Highlights include Villalpando's recently discovered *Adoration of the Magi*, on loan from Fordham University, and *The Holy Name of Mary*, from the Museum of the Basilica of Guadalupe.

The exhibition is organized by The Metropolitan Museum of Art and Fomento Cultural Banamex, A.C.

It is made possible by Citibanamex and Fundación Diez Morodo.

Additional support is provided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Mexico (SRE), AMEXCID, and the Consulate General of Mexico in New York.

Born in Mexico City around mid-century, Cristóbal de Villalpando may have begun his career in the workshop of Baltasar de Echave Rioja (1632–1682). Villalpando's rise to prominence coincided with the death of Echave Rioja in 1682, just one year before Villalpando painted his ambitious *Moses and the Brazen Serpent and the Transfiguration of Jesus*. Villalpando was celebrated in his lifetime, rewarded with prestigious commissions, and honored as an officer of the Mexico City painters' guild.

### Exhibition Overview

The exhibition begins with Villalpando's masterful *Moses and the Brazen Serpent and the Transfiguration of Jesus*, which was painted to decorate a chapel in Puebla Cathedral that was dedicated to a miracle-working image of Christ at the Column. In wealth and importance, Puebla Cathedral was second only to the Metropolitan Cathedral in Mexico City, for whose sacristy Villalpando also painted three monumental canvases.

This painting—the first in a series of important ecclesiastical commissions—marks a breakthrough in Villalpando's work, in terms of its grand scale and its audacious conception and execution. He signed it *Villalpando inventor*, an inscription that distinguishes the artist's intellectual achievement from his manual skill and asserts his professional status as the learned practitioner of a noble art.

In a bold and erudite arrangement, Villalpando juxtaposed the Old Testament story of Moses and the brazen serpent with the New Testament account of the Transfiguration—an unprecedented pairing of subjects. The two biblical events are staged within a single, continuous sacred landscape that encompasses the wilderness of Exodus and the holy mounts of Calvary and Tabor. Life-size figures of every age and gender, clothed and nude and in an astounding variety of poses and attitudes, populate the composition. The painting's lower half features the story of Moses making and using the image of the brazen serpent according to God's instructions to heal Israelites bitten by poisonous serpents. This episode provides a scriptural precedent for the making and use of images in worship, while also affirming the importance of art and artists. The upper half of the composition represents the transfiguration of Jesus's corporeal body into light, a scene that demanded nothing less than the materialization of light in paint, which Villalpando attained through

shimmering color and fluid brushwork.

Ten additional paintings by Villalpando will demonstrate his intense striving as an inventor; his great originality and skill; his ability to convey complex subject matter; and his capacity to envision the divine.

## Credits

The exhibition was curated by Ronda Kasl, Curator of Latin American Art in The American Wing at The Met; Jonathan Brown, Carol and Milton Petrie Professor of Fine Arts, Institute of Fine Arts, New York University; and Clara Bargellini, Professor, Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. The work of Dr. Brown and Dr. Bargellini was commissioned by Fomento Cultural Banamex. At The Met, the exhibition is designed by Michael Langley, Exhibition Design Manager; graphics are by Mortimer Lebigre, Graphic Designer; and lighting is by Clint Ross Collier and Richard Lichte, Lighting Design Managers, all of the Museum's Design Department. The restoration and installation of the Mexican loans was supervised by Agustín Espinosa, conservator of Fomento Cultural Banamex.

## Catalogue and Programs

Catalogues in English and Spanish published by Fomento Cultural Banamex will accompany the exhibition. Essays address the major themes of the exhibition. The English edition will be available for purchase in The Met book shop (\$25, paperback).

**A series of exhibition tours will complement the exhibition.**

Education programs will accompany the exhibition. Ronda Kasl will lead a "Conversation with a Curator" (August 17, 11:00 to 11:30 a.m.). Free with Museum admission.

A MetLiveArts concert by [Tembembe Ensemble Continuo](#): *Baroque Son* will explore the moment when European music traditions met New World rhythms (October 14, 7:00 p.m.). Tickets start at \$45.

This event is part of Celebrate México Now, a citywide festival of contemporary Mexican art and culture. [mexiconowfestival.org](http://mexiconowfestival.org).

Prior to its presentation at The Met, the exhibition was shown at [Palacio de Cultura Citibanamex](#) – Palacio de Iturbide, Mexico City (March 9–June 4, 2017).

The exhibition will be featured on The Met [website](#), as well as on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [Twitter](#).

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