

Partnership between painters and sculptors in 17th-century Spain: on model drawings by Francisco Rizi for an altarpiece of the Expectant Virgin

Eduardo Lamas-Delgado

Editing and peer review managed by:

Simon Laevers, Royal Institute for Cultural Heritage (IRPA-KIK), Brussels

Peer Reviewers:

Mark McDonald, Zahira Véliz

Abstract

This paper deals with a case study of the collaboration between sculptors and painters in the context of the construction of altarpieces in 17th-century Spain. It analyses a drawing by Francisco Rizi (Madrid, 1614-Escorial, 1685) in the British Museum depicting a sculptural group and fragments of an architectural framework, and relates it to two other drawings by the same artist in the National Library of Spain. They are identified as fragments of the design drawing of the former altarpiece of the Expectant Virgin in the church of the Calced Trinitarians in Madrid.

* * * * *

- [1] As shown recently by the London exhibition *The Sacred Made Real. Spanish Painting and Sculpture 1600-1700*, the Spanish tradition of painted wooden sculptures gave rise to remarkable partnerships between sculptors and painters for the creation of a single work of art¹. But painters did not just collaborate with sculptors to carry out the polychromy of their works; they also provided them with designs². The latter kind of partnership between painters and sculptors was particularly widespread in the context of the construction of altarpieces, usually a great enterprise that required collective work³. Spanish baroque altarpieces varied widely in form and size, but were always the product of a partnership between sculptors and painters, along with gilders, joiners, architects and draughtsmen. These large commissions were often contracted by one master, the *ensamblador* (altarpiece joiner), who acted as project manager, sub-contracting specific parts of the work to other artists⁴. On the one hand, he acted as a contact person for the customer and presented him the altarpiece design; on the other hand, he was also responsible for transportation and assembly of the materials. Many preserved architectural drawings were indeed created for altarpieces, providing models for collaborating artists as well as for submission to the patrons⁵. It was quite often a

¹ Xavier Bray, *The Sacred Made Real. Spanish Painting and Sculpture 1600-1700*, exh. cat., London 2009.

² Rocío Bruquetas, *Técnicas y materiales de la pintura española en los Siglos de Oro*, Madrid 2002, 381-423.

³ Juan José Martín González, *El retablo barroco en España*, Madrid 1995.

⁴ Susana Calvo Capilla et al., "Retablos españoles", in: *Centro Virtual Cervantes* (2000-2012), http://cvc.cervantes.es/actcult/art_reli/retablos/ (accessed 9 January 2013).

⁵ Zahira Véliz, *Spanish Drawings in The Courtauld Gallery. Complete catalogue*, London 2011, 27, 161.

painter, usually not even mentioned in the contract, who designed the entire altarpiece, including sculpture models and ornamental designs⁶. Among the draughtsmen who must have often worked in partnership with sculptors is Francisco Rizi (1614-1685), a painter whose drawings include several examples of designs for altarpieces and other decorative projects, for which he must have collaborated with other painters, architects and sculptors⁷.



1 Francisco Rizi, *Our Lady of the Expectation appearing to Simon de Rojas*, ca. 1654, pen and brown ink, brown and grey wash on paper, 196 x 125 mm. British Museum, London (reprod. from: M.P. McDonald, *Renaissance to Goya*, 98)

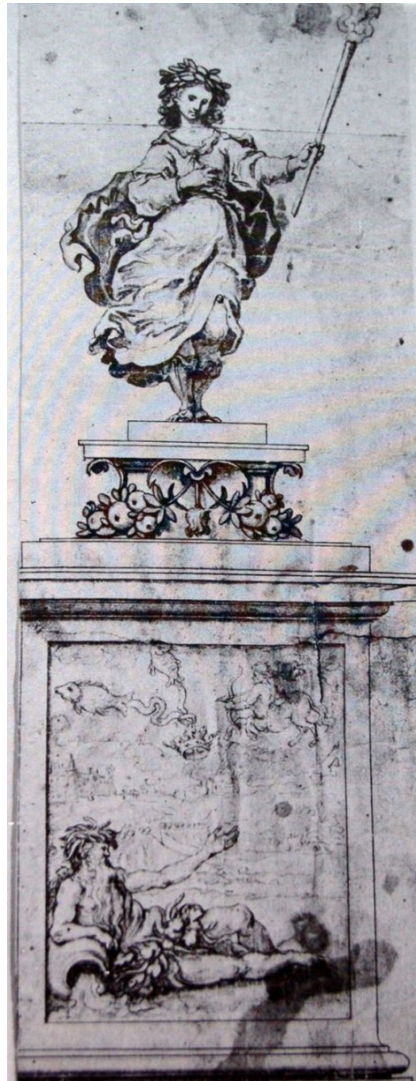
- [2] The British Museum preserves a drawing by Rizi that illustrates precisely this kind of collaboration⁸ (fig. 1). It represents two figures placed in an architectural setting and accompanied by two angels: the Virgin is depicted standing, admired by a kneeling friar with his hands folded in prayer. It actually is a representation of a group of in-the-round

⁶ Fernando Marías, "De retablero a retablista", in: *Retablos de la Comunidad de Madrid*, Madrid 2002, 97-109.

⁷ Alfonso E. Pérez Sánchez, *Historia del dibujo en España. De la Edad Media a Goya*, Madrid 1986, 240-244. About Rizi's collaboration with other artists: Jonathan Brown, *Painting in Spain, 1500-1700*, New Haven 1998, 192-198.

⁸ Mark McDonald, *Renaissance to Goya: Prints and Drawings from Spain*, exh. cat., London 2012, 98.

sculptures. Mark McDonald rightly attributes it to Rizi since the figures have indeed all the typical features of many of his drawings. The combination of the brown and grey wash, creating a particular effect of volume, is also typical for his architectural and sculptural designs. Moreover, some of these characteristics allow us to relate it to the drawings Rizi made for the construction of triumphal arches and other decorations for the Joyous Entry of Queen Mariana in Madrid in 1649⁹. Representative of this is a drawing in the National Library in Madrid that is interpreted as a model for an ephemeral statue of Hymen, the god of marriage, which was installed on the Entry's route¹⁰ (fig. 2).



2 Francisco Rizi, *Hymen*, ca. 1649, pen and brown ink and grey wash on paper, 392 x 128 mm. Biblioteca Nacional de España, Madrid (reprod. from: Pérez Sánchez, *Historia del dibujo en España*, 245)

⁹ Pérez Sánchez, *Historia del dibujo en España*, 245; Teresa Zapata Fernández de la Hoz, "La entrada en la Corte de Mariana de Austria. Fuentes literarias e iconográficas", in: Benito Navarrete Prieto, ed., *Fuentes y modelos de la pintura barroca madrileña*, Madrid 2008, 105-204.

¹⁰ Jonathan Brown, Lisa A. Banner and Susan Grace Galassi, eds., *The Spanish Manner: Drawings from Ribera to Goya*, exh. cat., New York 2010, 103-106.

[3] Its technique is very similar to that of the British Museum's sheet, particularly the brown wash used by Rizi for the draping, as well as two other sheets for the Entry, also in the National Library of Spain. These model drawings were made by Rizi to be used by a team of sculptors in much the same way as his altarpiece designs. Indeed, wooden baroque altarpieces were conceived as permanent triumphal arches and consequently their conception and construction led to the same kind of organisation¹¹. On this occasion, Rizi worked in collaboration with *ensamblador* Pedro de la Torre¹² (ca. 1596-1677) and with sculptors Juan Sánchez Barba¹³ (1602-1672), Sebastián de Herrera Barnuevo¹⁴ (1619-1671), Manuel Pereira¹⁵ (1588-1683) and Bernabé Contreras¹⁶. Typically, these successful collaborations among several masters were an opportunity to consolidate their regular networks, as well as an occasion for future partnerships. The latter must have been the case for the Expectation altarpiece, which was commissioned to *ensamblador* Pedro de la Torre some years later¹⁷. He probably invited Rizi and Sánchez Barba to collaborate, as a consequence of their previous successful professional experience.

The Expectation altarpiece

[4] The British Museum's drawing presents a curious Marian iconography: the crowned Virgin lifts her opened hands presenting her womb with the Child figure surrounded by a halo of rays. This representation must be related to the devotion for the Expectant Virgin¹⁸, an iconography that was also employed by Rizi in a later painting recently acquired by the Indianapolis Museum of Art¹⁹ (fig. 3). Indeed, veneration for Our Lady of the Expectation was particularly spread in courtly settings in Spain, as for example the private oratory of Queen Elisabeth of Bourbon (1602-1644) was dedicated to it²⁰. A popular Madrid confraternity known as *Esclavos del Dulce Nombre de María* was also devoted to the

¹¹ Benito Navarrete Prieto, Teresa Zapata Fernández de la Hoz and Antonio Martínez Ripoll, *Fuentes y modelos de la pintura barroca madrileña*, Madrid 2008, 114-115.

¹² Mercedes Agulló Cobo, "Pedro, José, Francisco y Jusepe de la Torre, arquitectos de retablos", in: *Anales del Instituto de Estudios Madrileños* 37 (1997), 25-70.

¹³ Juan L. Blanco Mozo, "Juan Sánchez Barba (1602-1672) escultor", in: *Anales del Departamento de Historia y Teoría del Arte* 15 (2003), 79-98, here 84.

¹⁴ Abraham Díaz García, "Sebastián de Herrera Barnuevo (1619-1671)", in: *Cuadernos de arte e iconografía* 37 (2010), 8-251.

¹⁵ Rubén Sánchez Guzmán, "El escultor Manuel Pereira (1588-1683)", in: *Cuadernos de arte e iconografía* 33 (2008), 6-223.

¹⁶ Zapata Fernández de la Hoz, "La entrada en la Corte de Mariana de Austria", 123.

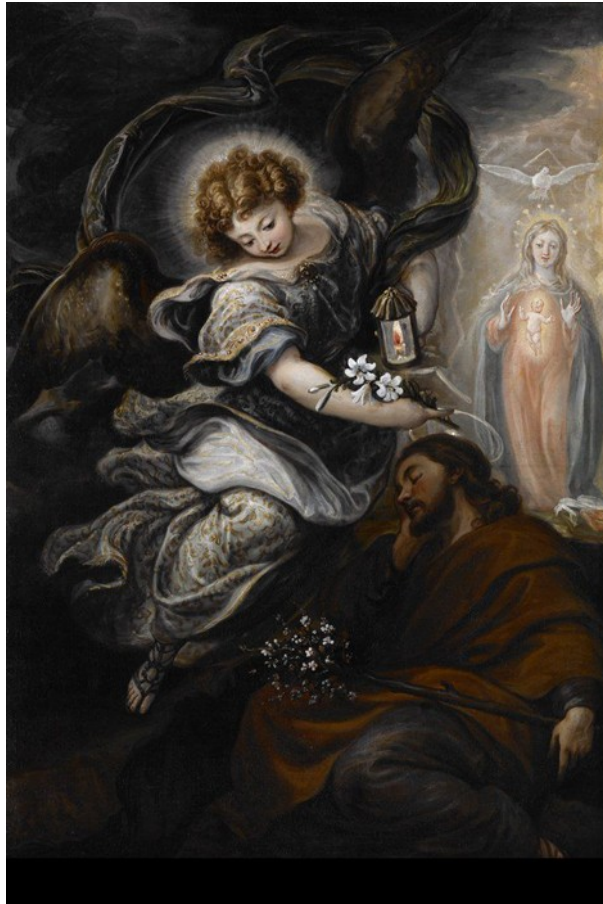
¹⁷ Documents about this commission have been gathered by de Carlos for her Ph-D dissertation: María Cruz de Carlos Varona, *Imagen y santidad en la España Moderna: el ejemplo de los Trinitarios calzados de Madrid*, Ph-D diss., Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 2005, II, 320

¹⁸ Anne Marie Velu, *La Visitation dans l'art: Orient et Occident, V^e - XVI^e siècle*, Paris 2012, 178-189.

¹⁹ Ronda Kasl, ed., *Sacred Spain: art and belief in the Spanish world*, exh. cat., Indianapolis 2009, 196.

²⁰ María Cruz de Carlos Varona, "Una propuesta devocional femenina en el Madrid de comienzos del siglo XVII: Simon de Rojas y la Virgen de la Expectación", in: *La imagen religiosa en la Monarquía hispánica: usos y espacios*, ed. C. Vincent-Cassy, Madrid 2008, 83-99.

Expectant Virgin and counted the royal family and prominent aristocrats among its members²¹.



3 Francisco Rizi, *The dream of S. Joseph*, ca. 1670-75, oil on canvas, 166 x 114 mm, signed: "RICI PICT REGI". Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indianapolis (reprod. from: Kasl, *Sacred Spain*, 196)

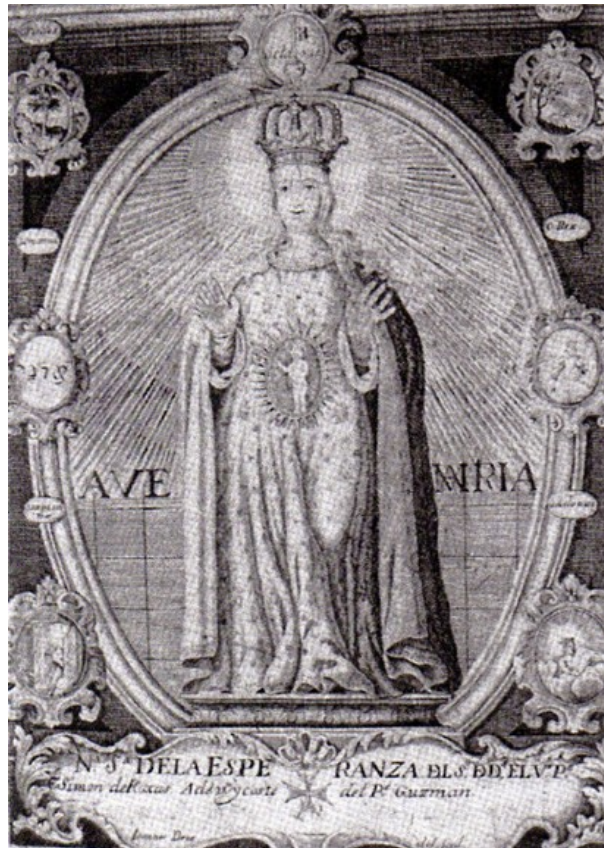
- [5] The centre of the congregation's spiritual life was a statue of the Expectant Virgin Mary designed according to a vision had by its founder, Trinitarian friar Simon de Rojas (1552-1624)²². Commissioned to sculptor Juan de Porres in 1624, the Virgin statue is known through an engraving made in 1739²³ and through Rojas' biographer's descriptions²⁴, allowing its identification in Rizi's drawing in the British Museum (fig. 4). The kneeling monk represented at the feet of the Virgin in the drawing, absent from the engraving, and wearing the Trinitarian cross on his cloak, must be recognised as a portrait of the friar at the moment of his vision.

²¹ 'The Slaves of the Sweet Name of Mary'. About this confraternity: Pedro Aliaga Asensio, *San Simón de Rojas: un santo en la corte de Felipe III*, Madrid 2009, 251-570.

²² Francisco de Arcos, *Primera parte de la vida del V. y Rmo. P. M. Fr. Simón de Rojas*, Madrid 1670, 331-332; Francisco de la Vega, *Vida del venerable siervo de Dios y finissimo capellan de Maria Santissima Padre Maestro Fray Simon de Roxas*, Madrid 1715, 226.

²³ De Carlos Varona, "Una propuesta devocional femenina en el Madrid de comienzos del siglo XVII", 87.

²⁴ Arcos, *Primera parte de la vida...*, 333; Vega, *Vida del venerable siervo de Dios*, 226-227.



4 Juan Pérez, *Our Lady of the Expectation*, 1739, engraving, 205 x 150 mm. Biblioteca Nacional de España, Madrid (reprod. from: del Corral, *La Congregación del Ave María*, 36)

- [6] Preceptor of the Infants and confessor of the Queen, Rojas was an influential religious man in the Madrid court during the reigns of Philip III and Philip IV. As he died in the odour of sanctity, some confraternity members intended to build a permanent chapel for the Virgin statue which would also house his tomb²⁵. The chapel was built in the former church of Calced Trinitarians in Madrid, Rojas' home and seat of the confraternity²⁶. Since the patrons expected the Church to soon recognize him as a saint, an altarpiece was commissioned to accommodate the statue along with an urn with his relics²⁷.
- [7] We propose here to identify Rizi's sheet in the British Museum as a fragment of the design for this altarpiece, the arrangement of which is revealed by two contemporaneous descriptions. The contract for the altarpiece's gilding provides the most information, confirming the link with the drawing²⁸. According to the contract, the statue of the Virgin was housed in a central niche with a background imitating brocades; next to it, there was

²⁵ Arcos, *Primera parte de la vida...*, 282-283; María Cruz de Carlos Varona: "La aparición de la Virgen a Simón de Rojas de Gaspar de Crayer: origen y contexto de una obra del Museo del Prado", in: *In sapientia libertas: escritos en homenaje al profesor Alfonso E. Pérez Sánchez*, Madrid 2007, 334-341, here 336.

²⁶ De Carlos Varona, *Imagen y santidad en la España Moderna*, II, 320.

²⁷ Arcos, *Primera parte de la vida...*, 282-283; De Carlos Varona, "La aparición de la Virgen a Simón de Rojas de Gaspar de Crayer", 336-337.

²⁸ De Carlos Varona, *Imagen y santidad en la España Moderna*, II, 331.

indeed a statue representing Simon de Rojas praying, as well as two figures of angels holding up a sign. These cherubs, also present in Rizi's drawing, hold a bunch of lilies and a sign reading 'Ave Maria', the popular name that Rojas' confraternity carries until today²⁹. The sculptural group was installed on "an urn in stone, similar to those in the Pantheon of the Escorial, ornamented with silver and bronze³⁰", the top of which is also visible in Rizi's drawing.

- [8] The descriptions of the altarpiece also point out that it was divided in two horizontal registers. In the main register the central niche was flanked by two large-size statues, on the right St John the Baptist, and on the left St Joseph. Lastly, the attic register was decorated with a painting on canvas representing the Holy Trinity, flanked by two sculptures representing St Francis and a Trinitarian saint.



5 Francisco Rizi, *St John the Baptist*, ca. 1654, pen and brown ink, brown and grey wash on paper, 146 x 62 mm. Biblioteca Nacional de España, Madrid (© BNE)

²⁹ José del Corral, *La Congregación del Ave María*, Madrid 1972.

³⁰ Arcos, *Primera parte de la vida...*, 282.



6 Francisco Rizi, *St Francis*, ca. 1654, pen and brown ink, brown and grey wash on paper, 143 x 62 mm. Biblioteca Nacional de España, Madrid (© BNE)

- [9] Both descriptions of the altarpiece arrangement led us to identify two other related drawings by Rizi. Conserved at the National Library in Madrid, they represent two figures of saints placed in an architectural setting³¹ (fig. 5-6). They must be considered as models for the statues of St John the Baptist, in the main register, and of St Francis, in the attic register, as confirmed by the presence of the ranking cornice of the altarpiece's pediment.
- [10] Technical and style features confirm the attribution to Rizi proposed by Pérez Sánchez³². Both drawings are executed in pen and grey wash for the architectural parts, and brown wash for the sculptures, as is common in Rizi's model drawings for altarpieces. The figures, particularly that of St Francis, likewise have technical features typical of his drawings, such as the way he renders the folds of draping using a thicker layer of wash.

³¹ They had been attributed to Alonso Cano: Ángel Barcia, *Catálogo de la colección de dibujos originales de la Biblioteca Nacional*, Madrid 1906, 224-225.

³² Previously, Wethey had refused their attribution to Cano: Harold E. Wethey, "Alonso Cano's drawings", in: *The Art bulletin* 34, 3 (1952), 217-234.

Furthermore, their style corresponds to the chronology of the altarpiece, which was completed in 1656³³.

- [11] These three surviving fragments from the altarpiece's original design drawing demonstrate Rizi's participation in its construction. However, the contract only points out the intervention of *ensamblador* Pedro de la Torre and sculptor Sánchez Barba³⁴, two artists who had worked along with Rizi in 1649. The altarpiece was commissioned in 1652 to Pedro de la Torre, who two years later signed the contract and engaged Sánchez Barba to carve the statues in-the-round. Rizi's absence in the contract leads to suggest the hypothesis that the *ensamblador* subcontracted him for the general design. Indeed, Palomino, Rizi's first biographer, as well as his preserved architectural drawings testify that he also carried out this kind of work³⁵.



7 Francisco Rizi, Design drawing of the altarpiece of *Our Lady of the Expectation*, ideal reconstruction (© Author)

³³ De Carlos Varona, *Imagen y santidad en la España Moderna*, II, 320.

³⁴ De Carlos Varona, *Imagen y santidad en la España Moderna*, II, 329-331.

³⁵ Antonio Palomino, *El Museo pictórico y escala óptica*, III, Madrid 1724, 409-411.

- [12] The drawings are certainly fragments of the complete altarpiece design that Pedro de la Torre submitted to the patrons for approval in 1654. Their similarity to the indications specified on the contract is evident. An ideal reconstruction of the altarpiece-design may be derived from the drawings and from some excerpts of the contract (fig. 7). The niche for the Virgin statue in the central vertical register was raised in relation to the lateral ones because of the space taken by the urn for the relics. This is testified by the position of the columns' capitals at each side of the British Museum's sheet. We furthermore point out that a very similar arrangement was employed on the altarpiece for the parish church in Fuente del Saz (fig. 8), also made in 1655, in which Rizi was involved as well³⁶. Here he contributed as painter, in partnership with Pedro de la Torre's nephew and habitual collaborator.



8 José de la Torre and Francisco Rizi, Altarpiece of St Peter, 1655.
Iglesia de San Pedro, Fuente el Saz del Jarama (© Author)

- [13] The original design for the Expectation altarpiece probably consisted of at least six pieces of paper pasted onto a secondary support, which would have been dismantled by later collectors and dealers in order to create numerous discreet images. Nevertheless, it is likely that copies of the critical areas would have been made for the various specialists involved in a complex assembly such a monumental altarpiece. In that case, Sánchez

³⁶ José L. Barrio Moya, "José de la Torre y Francisco Ricci, autores del retablo mayor de la iglesia de Fuente el Saz del Jarama", in: *Anales Complutenses* 12 (2000), 43-54.

Barba could have kept these copies in his possession and relied on them for new projects. At least on one occasion, this could have happened. In 1657, Sánchez Barba received a new commission for the sculptural group of *The Virgin donating the scapular to St Simon Stock*, now partially destroyed, for the main altarpiece of the Calced Carmelites in Madrid³⁷. As an etching from 1806 bears visual testimony to the group, it is possible to appreciate the many parallels with Rizi's design for the central niche in the Expectation altarpiece (fig. 9). The Virgin's features seem indeed inspired by Rizi's project, as well as the figure of St Simon, both housed in a niche. Moreover, the rest of the altarpiece also presented a similar structure and arrangement: two registers; a central niche flanked by two sculptures of saints, and a painting representing the Holy Trinity on the attic register³⁸.



9 Mariano Brandi and José Jimeno, *The Virgin donating the scapular to St Simon Stock*, 1806, etching and burin, 382 x 282 mm. Biblioteca Nacional de España, Madrid (reprod. from: Blanco Mozo, "Juan Sánchez Barba (1602-1672) escultor", 84)

³⁷ Conde de Viñaza, *Adiciones al diccionario histórico de los más ilustres profesores de las Bellas Artes en España*, Madrid 1894, III, 345-346.

³⁸ Diego Angulo and Alfonso E. Pérez Sánchez, *Pintura madrileña del segundo tercio del siglo XVII*, Madrid 1983, 198, n. 91.

- [14] In any case, Rizi's drawings provide new and relevant information for analysing the conception of Spanish baroque altarpieces. Painters as Rizi, Alonso Cano (1601-1667), José Ximénez Donoso (ca. 1632-1690) or Herrera Barnuevo often designed altarpieces and other decorative works, but were not legally responsible since they did not sign any contract before a notary³⁹. This ambiguity in the documentation can explain the fact that such an important design as that by Cano for the Franciscans in Alcalá was recently attributed to the *ensamblador* of the altarpiece, Sebastián de Benavente⁴⁰. Also representative of this confusion of authorship is the lost altarpiece for the church of San Ginés in Madrid. Whereas Palomino affirms it was designed by Rizi⁴¹, it has been attributed to *ensamblador* Juan de Lobera as only he is mentioned in the contract⁴².
- [15] The Expectation altarpiece was probably destroyed in 1897, when the church of the Calced Trinitarians in Madrid was demolished. But already little after its construction it was to be partially modified, as a decree by Pope Urban VIII had forbidden any worship to not canonized individuals, and particularly their depiction in altars. Rizi's drawings give us insight in the Expectation altarpiece's appearance, but above all they record essential aspects of altarpiece production in Baroque Madrid, when the cooperation of architects, sculptors, painters and draughtsmen was required in order to bring to completion such a monumental enterprise.

[<top>](#)

³⁹ Alfonso Rodríguez G. de Ceballos, "L'architecture baroque espagnole vue à travers le débat entre peintres et architectes", in: *Revue de l'art* 70 (1985), 41-52; Beatriz Blasco Esquivias, "Sobre el debate entre arquitectos profesionales y arquitectos artistas en el barroco madrileño. Las posturas de Herrera, Olmo, Donoso y Ardemans", in: *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma, Serie VII, Historia del Arte* 4 (1991), 159-194.

⁴⁰ Juan M. Cruz Yábar, "Sebastián de Benavente y la capilla de San Diego de Alcalá", in: *Archivo Español de Arte* 324 (2008), 379-394; Jonathan Brown, "Precisiones sobre la capilla de San Diego de Alcalá, en Santa María de Jesús, de Alcalá de Henares", in: *Archivo Español de Arte* 327 (2009), 316.

⁴¹ Palomino, *El Museo pictórico*, 410.

⁴² José L. Barrio Moya, "Dos desaparecidos retablos madrileños del siglo XVII", in: *Revista de la Biblioteca, Archivo y Museos del Ayuntamiento de Madrid* 9-10 (1981), 52-63.