

[The Funeral of Saint Bonaventure](#) by [Francisco de Zurbaran](#)
Original Lithographic Bookplate - Main Subject: Religion & Belief



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Medium
Original Lithographic Bookplate

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About Francisco de Zurbaran

Francisco de Zurbarán was born in Fuentes de Cantos, Badajoz Province (Estremadura), and baptized on Nov. 7, 1598. His father was a prosperous shopkeeper of Basque descent. In 1614 Zurbarán was in Seville, apprenticed to a mediocre painter of images, Pedro Díaz de Villanueva. Zurbarán opened a workshop in Llerena in 1617 and married an heiress older than himself. She died after having three children. He contracted a second marriage with a widow in 1623.

During his 11 years in Llerena, Zurbarán's piety was influenced by Spanish Quietism, a religious movement that taught inner withdrawal, the discovery of God in humbly submissive silence, and the use of penitential exercises to subdue the senses and calm the intellect. Although this influence had a profound effect upon his art, it in no way limited his artistic activities. The contracts for this period are so numerous that he would have been obliged to assign many of them to assistants. In addition, he was commuting to Seville (a 2-day trip) to execute works for the Dominican, Trinitarian, Mercedarian, and Franciscan monasteries.

In 1629 the Seville Town Council persuaded Zurbarán to move his workshop to their city. He arrived with his wife, children, and eight servants. The following year the painters' Guild of St. Luke ordered him to submit to an examination; he refused, and the town council supported him. His patrons continued to be mostly monasteries: the Capuchins, Carthusians, and Jeronymites were added to the list.

In April 1634 the painter Diego Velázquez, who was in charge of the decorations for the new Royal Palace in Madrid, commissioned Zurbarán to execute for the Hall of Realms two battle scenes, which were to belong to a series that included Velázquez's Surrender of Breda, and ten Labors of Hercules. (All the paintings, except one battle scene lost in a fire, are now in the Prado.) Zurbarán returned to Seville in November with the honorary title of Painter to the King and the happy memory that Philip IV had called him the king of painters.

Zurbarán was at a peak of creativity and felicity in 1639, when his wife died. His art production declined markedly and his style became more grave. He married for the third time, in 1644, but his artistic star was descending as the popularity of the young Bartolomé Esteban Murillo rose. Lacking sufficient commissions at home, Zurbarán was obliged to produce the majority of his works for South America, particularly Lima and Buenos Aires. With four more children born of his new marriage, he even sold Flemish landscapes and paints and brushes to the South American market. He continued to produce mostly for South America until 1658, when he decided to try to change his luck in Madrid. His art, however, was little appreciated there, and he died destitute on Aug. 27, 1664.

Zurbarán's art is an anomaly which causes some art historians to dismiss him as second-rate and others to praise him unrestrainedly. This is caused seemingly by a complexity of factors. It all stems, one surmises, from the basic paradox that Zurbarán was essentially a provincial profoundly involved with the infinite. This duality caused his art to be tense with opposites: sophisticated technique and ingenuous primitivism, precise exactitude and transcendent dissimilitude, accurate realism and ineffable mysticism, emphatic corporeality and divine immanence. His rigorous materiality is vibrated by stillness and silence, producing a tremolo audible to the ear of the soul. His saints wear no halos; they mysteriously exhale the breath of divine grace. There is an unabashed frankness in this holy deportment that may disconcert the unready observer. This there's-more-to-me-than-meets-the-eye halo is present even in his still lifes. Martin Soria (1953) was moved to quote Deuteronomy to express the transcendence of Still Life with Oranges (1633).

Fundamentally and almost exclusively, Zurbarán was a painter of religious subjects by his own free choice. He has a vast repertoire of monastic canvases. Of his extant works, approximately two-thirds were painted in the 1630s; the other third is about equally divided before and after that decade.

St. Serapion (1628) is an excellent example of Zurbarán's almost reverential fidelity to the physical while achieving his primary objective of expressing imperturbable sanctity. He had a singular preference for representing the Virgin Mary as a young child, and he invented a unique hagiography for individual, standing, female saints who are modishly dressed in 17th-century costumes, for example, St. Dorothy. He was an admirable portraitist with the ability to create an impact by a sense of immediacy or presence, as exemplified in Doctor of Salamanca. St. Luke Painting the Crucifixion (ca. 1639-1640) is believed to be a self-portrait. St. Luke is shown in half-length in front of his canvas in such a way that he appears to be actually standing beneath the cross at Golgotha. His right hand holds a long-handled brush against his chest; in his left, he holds the palette; his head is turned in profile, raised toward Christ. The attitude is one appropriate to Quietism, humble and contemplative.

Original Lithographic Bookplate

Sorry. No information about this medium is available.

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