

A Note on the cover picture La Immaculada de Soult

La Immaculada de Soult

This is one of Murillo's later works, painted in 1678, being one of the most solid and achieved of this master. The majestic plastic feel is accentuated by the atmospheric density that surrounds the figures.

The painting was confiscated in 1813, by Napoleon's general "Soult", but later returned to the Prado Museum in 1940, hence the name.

Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (Seville, December 31, 1617 - Seville, April 3, 1682) was a Spanish painter, one of the most important figures in Baroque painting in Spain. Although he is best known for his religious works, Murillo also produced a considerable number of paintings of contemporary women and children. These lively, realist portraits of flower girls, street urchins, and beggars constitute an extensive and appealing record of the everyday life of his times.

Murillo was born in Seville, the youngest son in a family of fourteen. His father was a barber and surgeon called Gaspar Esteban and his mother's name was María Pérez Murillo. His parents died when he was still very young, and Murillo was largely brought up by one of his older sisters, Ana, who was married to another barber-surgeon, Juan Agustín de Lagares, with whom the young Murillo maintained a close relationship. Murillo married Beatriz Cabrera in 1648, and they had nine children.

Murillo began his art studies under Juan del Castillo in Seville. Murillo became familiar with Flemish painting; the great commercial importance of Seville at the time ensured that he was also subject to influences from other regions. His first works were influenced by Zurbarán, Jusepe de Ribera and Alonso Cano, and he shared their



strongly realist approach. As his painting developed, his more important works evolved towards the polished style that suited the bourgeois and aristocratic tastes of the time, demonstrated especially in his Roman Catholic religious works.

In 1642, at the age of 26 he moved to Madrid, where he most likely became familiar with the work of Velasquez, and would have seen the work of Venetian and Flemish masters in the royal collections; the rich colours and softly modelled forms of his subsequent work suggest these influences. He returned to Seville in 1645. In that year, he painted thirteen canvases for the monastery of St. Francisco el Grande in Seville which gave his reputation a well-deserved boost. Following the completion of a pair of pictures for the Seville Cathedral, he began to specialise in the themes that brought him his greatest successes, the Virgin and Child, and the Immaculate Conception.

After another period in Madrid, from 1658 to 1660, he returned to Seville. Here he was one of the founders of the Academia de Bellas Artes (Academy of Art), sharing its direction, in 1660, with the architect, Francisco Herrera the Younger. This was his period of greatest activity, and he received numerous important commissions, among them the altarpieces for the Augustinian monastery, the paintings for Santa María la Blanca (completed in 1665), and others.

Murillo had many pupils and followers. The prolific imitation of his paintings ensured his reputation in Spain and fame throughout Europe, and prior to the 19th century his work was more widely known than that of any other Spanish artist.

[Information from Wikipedia]

The Feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary

As a truth of religion, the Immaculate Conception had been acknowledged at the Council of Ephesus in A.D. 431, and as early as the eighth century the feast of the "Conception" of the Most Blessed Virgin had been celebrated throughout the Greek Church. Under the Byzantine Emperors it spread to Italy and from there to England and Ireland in the ninth century. It was preserved by the Benedictine monks in the English calendar till the eleventh century, when it was suppressed by Lanfranc. The Franciscans

adopted the feast for their Order at their General Chapter in 1263, and Pope Sixtus IV, a Franciscan, introduced it in the diocese of Rome in 1477. The feast of the Immaculate Conception was extended to the universal Church by Pope Clement XI in 1708.

The Immaculate Conception was defined as a dogma of faith by Pope Pius IX in 1854 and, four years later, Our Lady appearing at Lourdes announced herself as the Immaculate Conception, thus confirming the Pontifical declaration.