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Antiquity and the Renaissance in Oceanside:

The European Legacy of the Last Judgment at Mission San Luis Rey de Francia

LIKE MUCH OF THE ART OF THE Upper California missions, the painting of the *Last Judgment* at Mission San Luis Rey de Francia reveals a long and vibrant pedigree in the European tradition. The composition is based on a Flemish print of a French masterpiece. Some elements of the French composition trace back to Classical and Renaissance works of art. This essay will identify these particular artistic details and explain how they made their way from Antiquity and Renaissance Rome, to Paris, Antwerp, Seville, Mexico City and, ultimately, to what is now Oceanside, California.

Jean Cousin's Last Judgment and its Influences

This study is indebted to the fundamental contributions made by Norman Neuerburg, James L. Nolan and Kurt Baer.¹ We know through their work,

1. Norman Neuerburg, "The Angel on the Cloud, Or 'Anglo-American Myopia' Revisited: A Discussion of the Writings of James L. Nolan", *Southern California Quarterly*, vol. 62, no. 1 (Spring 1980), pp. 7-8, 11-12; James L. Nolan, *Discovery of the Lost Art Treasures of California's First Mission*, San Diego, Copley Books, 1978, pp. 18, 25, 41, 44-47, 74-75, 80-81, 90, 112 (n. 101, n. 102), photos 32, 33, 34; Kurt Baer, *Painting and Sculpture at Mission Santa Barbara*, Washington, D.C., Academy of American Franciscan History, 1955, p. 226 (n. 18). There is a

for example, that the painting of the *Last Judgment* at Mission San Luis Rey is modeled on a painting of the *Last Judgment* created in 1585 by the French artist Jean Cousin the Younger (ca. 1525-ca. 1595).² Cousin's comparatively small painting—it measures approximately 145 × 137 cm (4¾ × 4½ feet)—was originally painted for the chapel of the Minimes in Vincennes and today hangs in the Musée du Louvre.³

The Revelation to John, chapter 14, verses 14-17 provided the Scriptural inspiration for Cousin's *Last Judgment*. The relevant passage reads as follows:

Then I looked, and there was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one like the Son of Man, with a golden crown on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand [...] [S]o the one who sat on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was reaped. Then another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle [...] [S]o the angel swung his sickle over the earth and gathered the vintage of the earth.⁴

As was the tradition for depictions of the Last Judgment, Cousin's painting is divided into three horizontal bands. The upper band represents Heaven, the central band represents Earth and the lower band represents the Infernal Realm or Hell. Cousin's painting presents the Heavenly Realm in standard format with Christ at the center with His feet on the globe. Beneath the globe, two angels sustain an open book. As described in the passage from Revelation, Christ bears a sickle in His left hand. He is flanked by the figures of Saint Mary and Saint John. This group is in turn flanked by the figures of Moses (holding

variation of the San Luis Rey *Last Judgment* presently at Mission San Antonio de Padua in Jolon, California. An inferior work, this lunette painting is less skillfully executed and less detailed incorporating significantly fewer human figures and the addition of a Hell mouth in the lower right corner. According to Baer and Nolan, the painting once hung in the sanctuary of Mission Santa Barbara. See Baer, *Painting and Sculpture*, pp. 186-188, cat. no. 93, fig. 132 and Nolan, *California's First Mission*, p. 64, photo 35.

2. Anthony Blunt, *Art and Architecture in France 1500-1700*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1999, p. 99, fig. 120.

3. Nolan, *California's First Mission*, p. 76; Craig Harbison, *The Last Judgment in Sixteenth-Century Northern Europe: A Study of the Relation Between Art and the Reformation*, New York, Garland Publishing, 1976, p. 207.

4. *The HarperCollins Study Bible, NRSV*, Wayne A. Meeks (ed.), New York, Harper Collins Publishers, 1993, *The Revelation to John (Apocalypse)* 14:14-17, p. 2327. For more on this and other illustrations of the Scriptural passage, see Harbison, *Last Judgment*, pp. 205-209.

tablets), David (holding a harp), Adam and Eve and various other members of the blessed community including Old Testament Prophets, biblical figures, saints, popes, nuns, friars, priests and angels.

In the central band, representing the Earthly Realm, an angel bearing a sickle stands before the temple of Heaven on Christ's right-hand side calling the blessed into the heavenly edifice. Again, this is as described in the Scriptural passage. To Christ's left, amid writhing serpents, a jumble of human figures scrambles to be chosen by the angels of Christ and granted eternal life. Cousin seems to have found additional inspiration for this portion of his composition in the paintings of his contemporary countryman Antoine Caron (1520-*ca.* 1598).⁵ A court painter at Valois, Caron was known for his busy portrayals of massacre scenes abounding with human figures.⁶ This same abundance of human figures is present in Cousin's *Last Judgment*. More importantly, the Classical architectural elements of Caron's paintings, specifically those in his composition known as *Gladiatorial Combat*, provided the architectural models for Cousin's *Last Judgment*.⁷ The design and placement of the round temple, miscellaneous monumental Classical structures and the campanile are nearly identical in both Caron's and Cousin's compositions.

In the lower band of Cousin's *Last Judgment*, the scene to Christ's right is calm, almost peaceful, as winged angels oversee the resurrection of the saved who had died. In contrast, in the area to Christ's left muscular nudes wrestling with demons struggle to escape their inevitable eternal damnation. One wretched group of sinners is herded by skeletal fiends into a boat for the journey across the river Styx. Here, at the bottom of the painting, are three figures that Cousin derived from Classical or Renaissance models.

5. Harbison, *Last Judgment*, pp. 206-207. See also, Blunt, *France 1500-1700*, pp. 98-100. Caron was probably familiar with the prints of Classical architecture and monumental perspective based on the drawings of Fleming Jan Vredeman de Vries (1527-*ca.* 1606). These prints circulated widely in the sixteenth-century. Coincidentally, there is currently a *Last Judgment* attributed to De Vries in the Rechtstädtisches Rathaus Historisches Museum, Gdansk. Dating to 1594-1595, its composition and architectural elements are similar to Cousin's. De Vries probably was familiar with the print of Cousin's painting.

6. Jean Ehrmann, "Massacre and Persecution Pictures in Sixteenth-Century France", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 8 (1945), pp. 195-199.

7. Robert Rosenblum, "The Paintings of Antoine Caron", *Marsyas*, 6 (1950-53), pp. 1-7, plate I, fig. 3. *Gladiatorial Combat* is currently in the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna where it is attributed to Paris Bordone (1500-1571). Rosenblum, however, is convinced it was painted by Antoine Caron. See Rosenblum, "Antoine Caron", p. 3. See also, Jean Ehrmann, "Antoine Caron", *Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire de l'Art Français*, 1945-1946, pp. 119 ff. and fig. facing p. 120.

The first of these figures is the diagonally-posed nude wrestler, with a cloth draped around his waist, just to the left of center at the bottom of the composition. Cousin's wrestler appears to be modeled after a very famous antique type now known as the *Borghese Gladiator*.⁸ Copies of the *Borghese Gladiator* proliferated throughout Europe. The copies were collected for their fame and beauty and studied by aspiring artists for their truthful rendering of human anatomy. Therefore, it is understandable that Cousin would model at least one of the human figures in his *Last Judgment* on this type.

The second figure in the lower band that Cousin appears to have based on an Antique model is the winged angel seated in the left-hand side of the painting. Part of this figure was inspired by a very famous work from antiquity known as the *Belvedere Torso*.⁹ Today, this fragmentary artifact is in the Vatican Museum in Rome. Reproductions of this piece were also generally available to artists at the time. They appeared in drawings, engravings, terracotta and wax models and numerous casts, including many casts used in art academies. Like the *Borghese Gladiator*, the *Belvedere Torso* was highly regarded for its truthful rendering of human anatomy and would have been familiar to any serious artist in sixteenth-century Europe.

The third figure of interest in the lower band is the terrified individual crouching in Charon's boat and holding his hands to his face and ears. Cousin's crouching figure seems to have been derived from the very famous representation of the *Last Judgment* painted in fresco by Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475-1564) in the early sixteenth century on the wall of the Sistine Chapel.¹⁰ In both Cousin's

8. Francis Haskell and Nicholas Penny, *Taste and the Antique. The Lure of Classical Sculpture 1500-1900*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1998, pp. 221-224, fig. 115. Many antique versions of what to appearances was the same statue circulated in Europe. When one of these statues entered the collection of a prominent person or family, it became the standard for its type. The statue that is today known as the *Borghese Gladiator* was first recorded in 1611, twenty-six years after the date ascribed to Cousin's *Last Judgment*, and sixteen years after the estimated date of his death. Assuming no error in these generally-accepted dates, it appears that Cousin worked from an identical or virtually identical antique version of the Borghese statue. Today the statue from the Borghese Collection is in the Musée du Louvre.

9. Ibid., pp. 311-314, fig. 165. The *Torso* was first recorded in a collection in the fifteenth century.

10. Loren Partridge et al., *Michelangelo, The Last Judgment: A Glorious Restoration*, New York, Harry N. Abrams, Inc. 1997, plate 1, p. 9. A painting of the *Last Judgment* attributed to the Peruvian painter Diego Quispe Tito (1611-1681) in the Chapel of San Francisco, Cuzco, although not a copy of Cousin's overall composition, incorporates the same crouching figure.



1. Anonymous, *Narración del Juicio Universal confirmada según testimonio dela Sagrada Escritura*, 18th-century, oil on canvas. Reproduced with permission of the Franciscan Friars, Mission San Luis Rey de Francia, Oceanside, California.

painting of the *Last Judgment* and Michelangelo's, the same figure in the same position is located in the identical part of the composition. Cousin may have seen the crouching figure in an engraved print of Michelangelo's masterpiece—there were many versions in circulation—or he may have personally sketched the figure during a visit to Rome. Like Caron's populous massacre scenes, Michelangelo's famously busy masterpiece, incorporating hundreds of human figures, also appears to have influenced Cousin's general composition.¹¹

When Cousin was engaged to create a composition based on a relatively obscure passage in Revelation he looked for inspiration to sketches or prints of earlier works. This is to be expected. The exercise of copying—either an entire composition or individual components—has been central to art practice since Anti-

11. Michelangelo's inclusion of non-biblical subject matter in his *Last Judgment* also seems to have influenced Cousin. See Partridge et al., *Michelangelo*, pp. 8, 104-114.

quity. One objective of copying was to place the newly-created work within the same esteemed tradition as its model. Thus, by basing architecture and human figures on superlative antique exemplars and Michelangelo's Sistine tour de force, Cousin was attempting to elevate his own work. Indeed he did. The resulting painting, the *Last Judgment*, became Cousin's most celebrated masterpiece.

Pieter de Jode's Print

The next work of interest is a print of Cousin's *Last Judgment* made by the Flemish engraver named Pieter de Jode (1570-1634).¹² Though De Jode's print deviates from its model in a few minor details, it nonetheless reproduces Cousin's complex composition, including the Classical architecture inspired by Caron's *Gladiatorial Combat*, the wrestler modeled after a *Borghese Gladiator* and the angel modeled after the *Belvedere Torso*. The print also includes the crouching figure in the boat derived from Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*. We know that De Jode was in France between 1595 and 1599; it was probably during this visit that he saw and sketched Cousin's painting. Later, when De Jode returned to Antwerp, the engraving was printed.

Pérez's Last Judgment

Another work of interest is a painting in Seville by Andrés Pérez (1660-1727).¹³ Pérez was an obscure disciple of the master painter Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (ca. 1618-1682) and possibly a member of this master's workshop. The painting was completed around 1713 and is today part of the collection at the Museo de Bellas Artes in Seville. Unfortunately, the painting is not presently on display or generally reproduced in museum catalogs. The most recent illustration of the painting was published in 1912.¹⁴ Though poor in quality, the black-and-white

12. Elena Santiago Páez et al., *Del amor y la muerte: dibujos y grabados de la Biblioteca Nacional*, Barcelona/Madrid, Fundació Caixa Catalunya/Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte-Biblioteca Nacional, 2001, fig. 101.

13. Diego Angulo Íñiguez, *Pintura del Siglo XVII—Ars Hispaniae*, Madrid, Editorial Plus-Ultra, 1971, vol. 15, p. 366.

14. José Gestoso y Pérez, *Catálogo de las pinturas y esculturas del Museo Provincial de Sevilla*, Madrid, J. Lacoste, 1912, fig. 128.

illustration shows that Pérez's painting is unmistakably a version of Cousin's composition, most likely one copied from De Jode's print. Although abbreviated, compressed and of seemingly lesser artistic quality, Pérez's composition does include all the figures which concern us here: the Classical architecture, the wrestler, the seated angel and the distinctive crouching character in the lower right hand corner holding his hands to his face and ears.

That De Jode's print found its way from Antwerp to Seville should come as no surprise. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Antwerp was one of the busiest ports in Europe and a commercial center for international trade. Long known for its printing houses, Antwerp was also a center for the dissemination of information and ideas. Moreover, after Charles V succeeded to the title of Holy Roman Emperor in 1520, Antwerp, indeed all of the Netherlands, became a dominion of Spain. Likewise, Seville was the commercial center of the Iberian Peninsula, acting as the middleman in trade between Spain and the ports of Europe, including Antwerp. Aesthetic links between the Netherlands and Spain were an obvious outgrowth of this commercial traffic.

Sánchez Salmerón's Last Judgment

Another painting based on Cousin's original work once adorned the sacristy of the church of Loreto in Mexico City.¹⁵ Dating to the mid- to late-seventeenth century, this version of the composition was painted by the New Spanish artist Juan Sánchez Salmerón (act. 1666-1679).¹⁶ Sánchez Salmerón modified his

15. Neuerburg, "Angel on the Cloud", pp. 7, 12, 41 (n. 28). A further *Last Judgment* presently hangs in the church of La Profesa in Mexico City. While not a copy of Cousin's overall composition, the Profesa painting incorporates many figures apparently based on Cousin's and copied from a print or painting in New Spain.

16. There seems some confusion, however, as to the one-time location of this painting. Manuel Toussaint claims it hung in the upper cloister of the Franciscan friary at Xochimilco and that a copy of it was in the sacristy of the church of Loreto in Mexico City. It is unclear whether he thinks Sánchez Salmerón was the author of both. Neuerburg, however, appears to have understood Toussaint to claim that the church of Loreto painting is by Sánchez Salmerón. The present-day whereabouts of either painting is unknown. A version of the composition was recently encountered in a private chamber of the Franz Mayer Museum in Mexico City. It is possible this is one of the paintings mentioned by Toussaint. It could be a previously unknown copy. It certainly is not Sánchez Salmerón painting as the composition is slightly different. See, Manuel Toussaint, *Pintura Colonial en México*, Mexico City, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México-Instituto

rendering of the composition with the addition of a *cartela*, that is, an escutcheon or shield containing a brief explanation of the picture's subject. In black-and-white photographs of the painting—the only images of the painting available today—the *cartela* appears to be inscribed, probably with Scriptural verses pertaining to the *Last Judgment*. Whether this embellishment was made at the suggestion of a priest or friar or conceived by the artist, it was no doubt executed to suit the needs of the congregation in New Spain. The addition of such text was not unusual in colonial New Spanish painting and in this case would help clarify the overall pictorial message of judgment and salvation. Though modified by the addition of the *cartela*, Sánchez Salmerón's composition is in essence a copy of Cousin's original painting and includes the Classical architecture, the figure of the wrestler, the seated angel and the crouching figure in the boat holding his hands to his face and ears.

Sánchez Salmerón's *Last Judgment* is probably based on De Jode's print. Again, there is good reason to believe that the print would have journeyed from Seville to New Spain given that Seville was the center of trade between Europe and Spain's American colonies. In fact, all trade with Spanish America, by law, was to have been conducted through the port of Seville. Indeed, prints arrived in the New World by the thousands—in devotional books, liturgical books and bibles, pattern books for artists, prayer books, hagiographies or saints' lives, psalmodies and hymnals and in loose devotional sheets. Furthermore, while the practice of copying was common in Europe, in New Spain such copying took on an added level of importance. After all, most New World artists, unlike their European counterparts, had never seen the original works on which many prints were based and did not have the opportunity to do so. In short, prints were an indispensable compositional tool for New World artists.

Mission San Luis Rey de Francia's Last Judgment

The above discussion provides the necessary background for understanding the *Last Judgment* at Mission San Luis Rey de Francia. According to James Nolan, the *Last Judgment* at Mission San Luis Rey was originally part of the

de Investigaciones Estéticas, 1965, pp. 114-115, fig. 186. See also, Manuel Toussaint, *Colonial Art in Mexico*, Elizabeth Weismann (trans.), Austin/London, University of Austin Press, 1967, p. 234. Neuerburg, "Angel on the Cloud", p. 41 (n. 28).

collection at Mission San Diego de Alcalá and only transferred to Mission San Luis Rey by Franciscan Friars in the mid-twentieth century.¹⁷ It is a formidable work measuring approximately 2.34×3.13 m (92.5 by 123.5 inches [some 10 by eight feet; far larger than Cousin's original]). Although badly in need of restoration, it remains one of the most complex and well-executed paintings in all the California Missions' collections. In its current condition it is impossible to determine if the painting is signed or dated. However, stylistically it appears to date to the mid-eighteenth century.

Certainly painted in Mexico and shipped to Upper California, and perhaps based on De Jode's print, it recreates Cousin's original composition. That the artist was familiar with the Sánchez Salmerón painting, or vice versa, is made evident by the exact duplication of the *cartela*, its frame and the structure of its text. Unlike the old photographs of Sánchez Salmerón's work, however, here it is possible to read the inscription. At the *cartela's* top is the painting's title: *Narracion del Juicio Universal Confirmada segun testimonio dela Sagrada Escritura*. This is followed by a series of Scriptural verses beginning with Isaiah chapter 13, verse 6, followed by similarly prophetic verses from the books of Malachi, Joel, Daniel, Ecclesiastes and Saint Matthew. Currently, eleven verses are visible; there is certainly a twelfth but what the text is, or whether there are more verses, are questions that can only be answered by the removal of the work's current frame. There are also verses imprinted on the Prophets' *banderoles*, thereby identifying them as the Old Testament figures Joel and Jeremiah and Daniel and Isaiah. Text has also been inscribed on the open book sustained by angels beneath Christ; it is the Book of Life described in Revelation, chapter 17, verse 8 in which are written the names of the elect.

The San Luis Rey *Last Judgment* deviates from Cousin's original composition in more than the addition of the *cartela* and the inscription of text. Four figures in framed medallions have been added as well. It is the frames of these medallions that suggest a mid-eighteenth century date for the painting; they are topped by ornamentation known as *rocaille*, an important element of eighteenth-century Rococo style. It is my view that the images in these medallions are not portraits of specific individuals, such as the Virgin Mary, as has been suggested in the past, but rather that they are personifications of the Four Last Things—Death, Judgement, Heaven, Hell—represented by an image of Death, a soul in Purgatory and a soul in Hell tormented by a vicious beast for

17. Nolan, *California's First Mission*, pp. 12-13.

eternity.¹⁸ In the same way that the addition of text helps clarify the didactic message of the overall composition to the literate, so the addition of these medallions reinforces the painting's message of judgment and salvation for those who cannot read. It is possible these pictorial medallions were added because the painting was bound for a California mission and was, therefore, to be displayed before an illiterate congregation.

Despite these embellishments, the general composition is remarkably close to the original painting by Cousin. Particularly noteworthy is the faithful transmission of the Classical architecture grounded in Caron's *Gladiatorial Combat* and the distinctive figures of the wrestler modeled after a *Borghese Gladiator*, the seated angel modeled after the *Belvedere Torso* and the character in the lower right-hand corner derived from Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* in the Sistine Chapel.

Conclusion

As this essay has established, four distinct and identifiable artistic elements traveled a long and complex journey: From Antiquity and Michelangelo's Renaissance hand in Rome, to Paris as part of Jean Cousin's exhilarating composition, to Antwerp and the Flemish press of Pieter de Jode, to the workshops of Seville and Mexico City and, finally, to a frontier mission on the fringes of the Spanish Empire in Upper California. This brief investigation of a few captivating details of one Colonial-era Mission painting highlights the important links between major European works of art and the art of the Missions of Upper California. It offers tangible evidence of the process of imitation—across centuries and great geographic expanse—and helps us appreciate the worthy lines of tradition present in California Mission art. ♣

18. For prior identification of the images as portraits, see Baer, *Painting and Sculpture*, p. 187.

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