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The Paintings Left Behind: Two New Paintings by Mary Cassatt from Seville

M. Elizabeth Boone, University of Alberta, Canada

Years earlier, fortune had favored me. When a stranger in a Manhattan nightclub had offered to show me a lost Spanish-subject painting by William Turner Dannat (1853–1929) he kept in an out-of-the way Bronx neighborhood, I moved past the obvious absurdity of this proposal and found a work that embellished my dissertation. Now boarding a train toward an affluent suburb northeast of Madrid, I wondered what this journey would bring. I had been contacted a little over a year earlier by a person who claimed to have two paintings by Mary Cassatt (1844–1926). As far as I knew, the only Cassatt painting in a Spanish collection was a beautiful mother and child from about 1890, which had been purchased by the provincial government of Vizcaya from the *Exposición Internacional de Pintura y Escultura* for the Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao in 1919.¹ But this collector had written a very intriguing email:

Let me introduce myself: I am Sevillian and live in Madrid. As I am much interested in nineteenth century Spanish painting, I have done some research about [costumbrista painting in Seville]. I also have read your splendid book *Vistas de España*, and I have found some interesting details you might be interested to know about. I have in my collection two paintings related to some paintings by Mary Cassatt that are in your book and as far as I know are completely unknown to the scholars. One represents a young Sevillian girl in a window, is signed on the left corner, similar in concept of 4.17 illustrated and similar size: 62,5 x 48,5 cm. The other one is clearly the sketch of 4.2 (*On the Balcony*).²

I was skeptical—as Cassatt did not produce many studies—but I did a quick Google search to see if I could verify the identity of the individual who had written. Bingo! I did indeed



Fig. 1. Mary Cassatt, *On the Balcony*, 1872–73. Oil on canvas, 39 3/4 × 32 1/2 in. Inscribed lower left: *M.S.C./Seville/1873*. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Gift of John G. Johnson for the W.P. Wiltstach Collection

find his book, the study of a mid-nineteenth-century costumbrista (genre) painter from Seville who specialized in picturesque Andalusian subjects. I also wrote back and asked for images. It seemed like a long shot, but Cassatt had begun her career in Spain, spending six months in Seville during the winter of 1872 to 1873. Her most well-known paintings from the trip are *On the Balcony* (fig. 1), *Offering the Panal to the Bullfighter* (1873; Clark Art Institute), and *Toreador*, also known as *After the Bullfight* (1873; Art Institute of Chicago). These are among Cassatt’s first mature paintings. *On the Balcony* derives partly from her study of Bartolomé Esteban Murillo and Francisco Goya, and its early exhibition with the title *The Flirtation: A Balcony in Seville* makes its amorous content obvious.³ *Offering the Panal*—the panal is the honeycombed sweet being dipped into a glass of water held by a cocky young woman—is likewise anecdotal and romantic in theme. Cassatt also produced several single-figure images of women during her sojourn in Seville: *Head of a Spanish Girl* (1872; private collection), *Spanish Girl Peeling an Orange* (fig. 2), and the painting known today as *Spanish Dancer Wearing a Lace Mantilla* (fig. 3). All these paintings, with the exception of *Head of a Spanish Girl*, appear in the Adelyn Breeskin Cassatt catalogue raisonné.⁴ Throughout years of studying artists from the United States who traveled to Spain, I have often wondered how many of them left things behind. At the beginning of her career and without a ready market for her work, might Cassatt have been one of them?



Figs. 2, 3. Left: Mary Cassatt, *Spanish Girl Peeling an Orange*, 1872. Oil on canvas, 22 x 18 in. Inscribed vertically at left: *M. Stevenson Cassatt/Seville*. Private Collection, Texas; right: Mary Cassatt, *Spanish Dancer with a Lace Mantilla*, 1873. Oil on canvas, 25 5/8 x 19 3/4 in.. Inscribed lower left: *M.S.C./Seville/1873* and signed again lower left: *Mary Cassatt*. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Gift of Victoria Dreyfus

Cassatt traveled to Seville from Paris, stopping off in Madrid to visit the Museo del Prado. She arrived in the capital city on October 5 and made her way quickly to the famed museum. Three weeks later, after copying Diego Velázquez, *Don Baltasar Carlos* (c. 1635; Museo del Prado) and gaining renewed appreciation for the work of Murillo, Cassatt arrived in southern Spain. Whereas the landscape between Madrid and the south had been “immensely sad, vast, and dreary,” Seville was “full of color, gay lively, the Cathedral

magnificent, orange trees growing in the streets and squares." She awoke the day after her arrival, on Tuesday, October 26, to find "the sun shining brightly on this beautiful clean town, [and] a most delicious spring temperature."⁵ Hoping to paint original works in the charming Andalusian town, she soon found a studio in the Casa de Pilatos, a sixteenth-century palace belonging to the ducal family of Medinaceli in the nineteenth century.

Cassatt's new workplace undoubtedly fostered her enthusiasm for Spanish subjects, for the Casa de Pilatos had become a tourist site, and guidebooks listed it among the most picturesque attractions in Seville. Commissioned in 1520 after a pilgrimage to Jerusalem by Fadrique Enríquez de Ribera (1476–1539), the first marquis of Tarifa, and constructed in an eclectic mixture of Italian Renaissance and Spanish Mudéjar styles, the building combines open patios adorned with classical sculpture, brilliant Andalusian tile work, and various allusions to Christ's passion. During Cassatt's residence, the palace was only occasionally occupied by relatives and friends of the Medinaceli family. The most frequent visitors were artists and other travelers who wanted to see the building's unusual architecture, and these individuals were welcomed by the Barrera family, who served as caretakers. One of the family, Manuel Barrera, was an amateur painter and, according to Cassatt, it was he who offered her a room in the palace for use as a studio.⁶



Figs. 4, 5. Mary Cassatt, Study for *On the Balcony*, c. 1872. Oil on board, 12 3/8 x 9 in. Private Collection, Madrid; right: Mary Cassatt, *Spanish Girl Leaning on a Window Sill*, c. 1872. Oil on canvas, 24 3/8 x 19 in. Inscribed lower left: *Mary S. Cassatt*. Private Collection, Madrid

Several days after my emailed request, the images arrived in my inbox, and it was these that precipitated my trip to the northern suburbs of Madrid. The first seemed to be a rough oil sketch for *On the Balcony* (fig. 4); the second was a completely new composition, depicting the same model who appears in *Spanish Girl Peeling an Orange* and *Spanish Dancer Wearing a Lace Mantilla*, casually leaning against a window sill (fig. 5). The pose, arms

crossed and draped over a support that parallels the picture plane, is similar but in reverse to that employed for the woman on the left of *On the Balcony*. I eventually learned that the paintings had descended through the Barrera family to a woman who lived around the corner from the palace. From Manuel Barrera, who died without issue, they had passed to his nephew Alejandro Cabrera Rodríguez de Andrade. My correspondent had seen the paintings and recognized their connection to Cassatt after reading my book. Eventually, he was able to purchase them and have them professionally conserved.⁷

Cassatt had described her meeting with Manuel Barrera in a letter to her friend Emily Sartain, written on New Year's Eve, 1872:

I am all day at Pilats [*sic*] house, and am known as the "Señora of the Casa Pilatos," Sundays and weekdays, Christmas and New Years Day—I get there sometimes at ten, or half past seldom as late as eleven, and work steadily to five The "intendente" of the Duke of Medina Coeli is a Don Manuel Barrera, he paints very badly himself, but it is he who gave me my studio in the House of Pilate; for he lives there, strange to say although he paints so badly he knows all about art, and has seen so many good artists at work that he can give very good advice, so I profit by it. I suppose you know that the House of Pilate belongs to the Medina Coeli.⁸

Manuel Barrera Haedo (active 1849–1876) is indeed a marginal figure in the history of Spanish painting.⁹ Listed in the Madrid periodical *El Clamor Público* as exhibiting in the



Fig. 6. Manuel Barrera, *Danza en un interior* (*Dance in an Interior*), 1854. Oil on canvas, dimensions unknown. Inscribed lower left: *Manuel F. Barrera/1854*. Private Collection, Seville; Photography by Pedro Feria

May 1849 *Exposición de Bellas Artes* in Seville, he appears again in Manuel Ossorio, *Galería biográfica* as having won a bronze medal in the Seville exhibition of 1858.¹⁰ He is also listed as a painter in the first edition of Manuel Gómez Zarzuela, *Guía de Sevilla* in 1865, along with more well-known compatriots Joaquín Domínguez Bécquer (1816–1879), Manuel Barrón y Carrillo (1814–1888), and Manuel Cabral y Aguado Bejarano (1827–1891), with whom his work is often confused.¹¹ Like Domínguez Bécquer and Cabral Aguado Bejarano, Barrera specialized in costumbrista painting; art historians Enrique Valdivieso and José Fernández López included two of his paintings, correctly ascribed, in their recent book on painting in Seville.¹² *Danza en un interior* (fig. 6) gained a certain degree of notoriety during its time, as it was professionally photographed by Charles Clifford and, on occasion, copied by others.¹³ The subject of a woman dancing atop a table, surrounded by guitar players and other accompanists, was frequently essayed by costumbrista painters in Seville.

Although Cassatt did not admire Barrera as a painter, she did find him an astute critic. For his part, Barrera clearly appreciated Cassatt's work and, with his knowledge of the artistic community in Seville, was able to provide Cassatt with introductions to painters and collectors in the city. And Cassatt was keen to meet them. She wrote candidly to Sartain about working in Spain, never thinking her impolitic words would be made public almost a century and a half later:

The great thing here is the odd types and peculiar rich dark colouring of the models, if it were not for that I should not stay, the artists here are perhaps more flattering than they were in Parma, but I think the Spaniards infinitely inferior in education and breeding to the Italians. There is I believe a fine collection of modern paintings owned by an amateur here. Fortuny's Madrazos & x, the gentleman called on me, but his gallery is undergoing repairs and I am not to see it yet.¹⁴

The collector she mentions was probably José Domingo Irureta Goyena (1830–1921), a friend of Mariano Fortuny (1838–1874) and a resident in Seville. Irureta Goyena had married into the Errazu family and, like his brother-in-law Ramón de Errazu, amassed an impressive collection of paintings by Spanish artists, including works by Raimundo Madrazo (1841–1920) and Martín Rico (1833–1908), in addition to Fortuny; he exhibited them in his mansion on the nearby Plaza del Triunfo.¹⁵ Madrazo had spent part of 1872 in Seville, and Cassatt may have been referring to one of his Sevillian paintings when she continued to her friend: "Nowadays everything is fashion however, and at present it is grey color, here is Madrazo paints these gypsies with cheeks like some deep red peaches, and he paints them with Malachite green and white. His modelling and his manner as far as I have seen is fine."¹⁶

Madrazo's *Gypsy* (fig. 7), which came to the Prado from the Errazu collection, makes a compelling comparison to this newly discovered painting by Cassatt; both have taken advantage of the "peculiar rich dark colouring of the models," adorning their raven hair with red carnations, silver earrings, and a red and white mantilla. Cassatt, who probably painted *Spanish Girl Leaning on a Window Sill* early in her stay, before *On the Balcony*, has still not quite learned how to keep the black trim on her model's dress from sitting on the surface of the canvas, yet the modeling of her sitter's face, the shadows of the neck, and the tapered fingers resting on the forearm are executed with considerable finesse. The signature, "Mary S. Cassatt," and the dimensions, not quite 25 x 20 inches, conform to other paintings created at this time.

Whereas Barrera, an amateur painter a generation older than his young friend from Philadelphia, worked in a traditional costumbrista manner, Cassatt was moving toward the more naturalistic and cosmopolitan trends of Paris. Barrera wrote



Fig. 7. Raimundo Madrazo, *Una gitana* (*A Gypsy*), 1872. Oil on canvas, 26 x 19 5/8 in. Inscribed upper left: *R. Madrazo*. Museo Nacional del Prado, Legacy of Ramón de Errazu y Rubio de Tejada

soon after her departure from Seville, offering her the studio again the following winter. "It is immense," Cassatt told Sartain, with "two windows, so if you want to come, we can divide w/ curtains."¹⁷ Sartain's response is not recorded, and Cassatt ultimately decided to settle in Paris; she did not return to Spain until some thirty years later, in 1901, traveling as far as Madrid but not to Seville. The addition of these works to Cassatt's oeuvre brings the nature of this innovative painter's early artistic development into greater relief; it also demonstrates the extent to which artists from the United States were looking beyond their immediate surroundings in the early 1870s. Cassatt may have given these two paintings to Barrera in appreciation for his advice, or she may have simply forgotten them in the studio when packing for the next stage in her journey, leaving behind a memory of her visit with a friend in Seville.

Notes

¹ *Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao: Maestros antiguos y modernos* (Bilbao: Fundación BBK, 1999), 154–55. Many thanks to María Teresa Paliza Monduate, professor of art history at the Universidad de Salamanca, for sharing the curatorial records on this painting.

² Email from the owner to the author, December 23, 2016.

³ *Exhibition of Paintings, Engravings, Drawings, Aquarelles, and Works of Household Art in the Cincinnati Industrial Exposition*, September 3–October 4, 1873, no. 184.

⁴ Adelyn Dohme Breeskin, *Mary Cassatt: A Catalogue Raisonné of the Oils, Pastels, Watercolors, and Drawings* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1970), cat. no. 18 (as *On the Balcony during the Carnival*); cat. no. 20 (as *Peasant Woman Peeling an Orange*); cat. no. 21 (as *Spanish Dancer Wearing a Lace Mantilla*); cat. no. 22 (as *Torero and Young Girl*); and cat. no. 23 (as *Toreador*). Breeskin's titles are often descriptive rather than based on early exhibition or publication records, which has led to variations and inaccuracies. The painting she calls *On the Balcony during the Carnival*, for example, was not painted during Carnival season but rather in December and January, 1872 to 1873. The painting now called *Spanish Dancer Wearing a Lace Mantilla* was published in 1873 as both *A Seville Lady* and *Spanish Lady*; it was not called a Spanish dancer until several decades after Cassatt's death, in 1954, and no real evidence supports this identification. Many thanks to Elizabeth Oustinoff, Adelson Galleries, who provided me with the entries authored by Pamela Ivinski and the Mary Cassatt Catalogue Raisonné committee for all six of the previously known paintings from Seville. The Cassatt Committee is no longer active and has not examined these works.

⁵ Cassatt to Emily Sartain, Seville, October 27, 1872, in Nancy Mowll Mathews, *Cassatt and Her Circle: Selected Letters* (New York: Abbeville, 1984), 109.

⁶ Other members of the Barrera family living in the house during the time of Cassatt's residency were Ángel Barrera and Dolores Barrera. Ángel Barrera is listed as head administrator, with Manuel as his assistant. All were in charge of the principal rooms and later, the gardens, stalls, barns, and garage. See Joaquín González Moreno, *La Casa de Pilatos en el siglo XIX* (Cordoba: Puente-Genil, 1983), 244 and 300.

⁷ The condition reports reveal that neither work is varnished and both had a large amount of accumulated dirt on the surface. The painting of the woman leaning on the window sill had also suffered two tears: one small 3/8-inch split in the canvas to the right of her head and the other, vertical and about 2 3/8 inches long, on her sleeve.

⁸ Cassatt to Sartain, Seville, New Year's Eve, 1873, in Mathews, *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 113–14. Although Cassatt dated the letter 1873, it was undoubtedly written on December 31, 1872.

⁹ Many thanks to Manuel Piñanes García-Olías, who has been researching Barrera, for giving me access to his unpublished files on the painter.

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- ¹⁰ Esperanza Navarrete Martínez, *La Pintura de la época isabelina en la prensa madrileña* (Madrid: Fundación Universitaria Española, 1986), 57 and 106; Manuel Ossorio y Bernard, *Galería biográfica de artistas españoles del siglo XIX* (1883; reprint. Madrid: Distribución exclusiva, Librería Gaudí, 1975), 70.
- ¹¹ Manuel Gómez Zarzuela, *Guía de Sevilla* (Seville: La Andalucía, 1865), 128. Barrera continues to appear in the guides until 1876, after which his name disappears from the record.
- ¹² Enrique Valdivieso and José Fernández López, *Pintura romántica sevillana* (Madrid: Fundación Endesa El Viso, 2011), 220–21.
- ¹³ Francisco Crábiffosse Cuesta, *Clifford en España (1849–1863): Colección Martín Carrasco* (Oviedo: Museo de Bellas Artes de Asturias, 2000), 56; a copy of *Fiesta en un interior*, signed and dated “Gualtieri 1863,” was auctioned by Isbilya Subastas, Seville, April 1, 2017, lot 264.
- ¹⁴ Cassatt to Sartain, Seville, New Year’s Eve, 187[2], in Mathews, *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 114.
- ¹⁵ Gómez Zarzuela mentions the Irureta Goyena collection in *Guía de Sevilla* (Seville: La Andalucía, 1875), 226–27. The Errazu collection was bequeathed to the Museo del Prado in 1904. See Javier Barón, *El Legado Ramón de Errazu: Fortuny, Madrazo y Rico* (Madrid: Museo Nacional del Prado, 2005).
- ¹⁶ Cassatt to Sartain, Seville, New Year’s Eve, 187[2], in Mathews, *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 114.
- ¹⁷ Cassatt to Sartain, Antwerp, June 25, [1873], in Mathews, *Cassatt and Her Circle*, 122.