Jose (Josef) Francisco Xavier de Salazar y Mendoza (c. 1750-1802)

Alpuente family of New Orleans
Portraits to be offered
January 19th, 2019
The Yucatán-born painter Josef Francisco Xavier de Salazar y Mendoza (c. 1750-1802) arrived in Louisiana in 1784 and spent eighteen years creating portraits in New Orleans during the Spanish administration (1762-1802) of New Orleans. The subject of a recent monographic exhibition at the Ogden Museum of Southern Art titled *Salazar: Portraits of Influence in Spanish Louisiana, 1785-1802* (March 8-September 2, 2018), Josef Salazar is now recognized as North America’s only known eighteenth-century Spanish colonial portraitist. Fewer than fifty Salazar portraits are documented and most remain in New Orleans collections. These highly rare likenesses of New Orleans leading military figures, merchants, and their families evoke a complex geopolitical scene within the Spanish borderlands. They broadly document French Creoles and Spanish military personnel and their families, but also Anglo-American speculators such as General James Wilkinson (1757-1825), who were increasingly present in that contested locale. Salazar, while not known to have been formally trained in his hometown of Mérida, generally reflects Mexican colonial portraiture in his works. His paintings, while comparatively naïve, nevertheless fuse traditional neoclassical European compositional aspects (fictive oval surrounds) with popular tropes, competently executed visages, and costume details.

During the course of the exhibition *Salazar: Portraits of Influence in Spanish Louisiana, 1785-1802*, several previously undiscovered Salazar portraits were identified, including this pair. The first shows Matías Francisco Alpuente y Ruiz (c. 1750-1812). A second represents Matías’ first or second wife: Marguerite Duplessis Alpuente y Ruiz (1761-1790) with son Francisco Bonaventure Alpuente y Ruiz (1783-1842) or Isabelle de Chouriac (1773-1850) and another Alpuente child.

The Alpuente family is among those identified in Stanley Clisby Arthur’s *Old Families of Louisiana* (1931) as one of the earliest and most illustrious. Born in Requena de Campos (Palencia, Castille), Spain in about 1755, Matías entered Louisiana under the auspices of Alexander Ó’Reilly sometime between 1766 and 1780. Numerous colonial records in the collection of the Louisiana State Museum document the role of Matías de Alpuente as *mayordomo de propios* (financial administrator) at the Cabildo from 1788-1791. (See Din and Harkins, *New Orleans Cabildo*, 72 and Emily Clark, *Masterless Mistresses: The New Orleans Ursulines and the Development of a New World Society, 1727-1834*, 146). In St. Louis Cathedral, on December 31, 1780, he married Louisiana-born Marguerite Duplessis, the daughter of Tours-born François Clément Amirault Duplessis and New Orleans native Marie Sautièt. Seven children were born of this union and the eldest is presumed to be documented here: Francisco Bonaventure Alpuente y Ruiz (1783-1842). Matías Alpuente built a residence on a site at the corner of Rampart and Dumaine for this family. It was later rebuilt and occupied by generations of his descendants, along with other French Quarter sites, as documented in the Collins Diboll Vieux Carré Survey.
Following the death of Marguerite Duplessis in 1790, Matias married Isabel de Chouriac (1773-1850), who bore four more children between 1796 and 1803. While plausible that the mother shown in Salazar’s second portrait represents Isabel de Chouriac de Alpuente, it remains possible that she represents Marguerite de Alpuente given the direct patrilineal descent of this pair of portraits within the family of Matias and Marguerite’s eldest son Captain Francisco Bonaventure Alpuente y Ruiz (1783-1842), who married Catherine Isabelle Millon (1777-1850) in 1813.

Of Captain Francisco Bonaventure de Alpuente, Stanley Clisby Arthur notes:

*During the War of 1812, Don Francisco Bonaventura de Alpuente raised a company of volunteers for service in the campaign of 1814-15 against the English army then threatening New Orleans. An autographed letter of General Jackson orders Captain de Alpuente to English Lookout, in the vicinity of the Rigolets, as a ‘forlorn hope,’ with instructions to hold at all hazards until reinforcements could be sent. But the English advance against the city was made from below, and the historic battle was fought without giving Captain de Alpuente the opportunity of taking his men into action to participate in that wonderful and glorious victory. (‘Alpuente Family,’ Arthur, 1931, 16-17)*

At the time of this mission, Captain Alpuente’s eldest son Dr. François Ruiz Alpuente (1814-1876) was born on July 4, 1814 in a new residence at the site of Matias’s home at Rampart and Dumaine. Later educated at St. Joseph’s College at Bardstown, Kentucky, François subsequently studied medicine in Paris. Later Dr. Alpuente established a hospital on Magazine Street and authored an early treatise on obstetrics based on his extensive practice of nearly forty years (see also *New Orleans Medical Surgical Journal*, Vol. 26 (1873-4)). From Dr. Alpuente, these portraits descended to his daughter Marie Mathilde Alpuente Bailey (1843-1914) and to his granddaughter Mathilde Antoinette Bailey Moore (1882-1960) Moore), and thus by descent to the present consignors.
Importantly, both portraits are documented in *The Times-Democrat* of January 24, 1892, on page twelve in a column titled “Louisiana Families III.” This article is written by Charles Patton Dimitry, himself a descendant of Salazar’s noteworthy subject Marianne Celeste Dragon Dimitry (1777-1856), a woman of Greek, French Canadian, African, and American Indian descent, and whose own identity was the subject of a famous nineteenth-century trial (Gontar, *Salazar: Portraits of Influence*, 2018, p. 150-153). Dimitry’s article includes sketches of the Alpuente portraits taken in the home of Mathilde Alpuente Bailey on St. Andrew Street in New Orleans. The three-quarter sleeved white gown worn by Madame Alpuente y Ruiz is akin to that worn by her contemporary Marianne Dragon Dimitry. For example, corset-like bodices on these gowns cover lace-edged chemises below. Salazar’s painterly style is evident in the loose brushwork comprising this clothing, particularly in the Alpuente infant’s gown. Further, both portraits bear traces of Salazar’s characteristic red priming layer. All subjects’ composed expressions and formal bearing reflect the psychological distancing generally characteristic of such colonial portraiture. Finally, Salazar’s oeuvre includes several Madonna-like portraits to which the image of Madame Alpuente is distinctly similar in composition.

Salazar’s likeness of the uniformed Matias Alpuente y Ruiz reflects his roles as a “carabinier” (cavalry man with rifle) and Cabildo official prior to 1792. Spanish cavalry regiments wore red or white coats. Alpuente’s scarlet jacket with white, gold-trimmed lapels reflects that of the Distinguished Company of Carabiniers Militia of New Orleans ca. 1780. This uniform is illustrated by F. Lull in José María Bueno’s *The Army of Spain in the American Revolution and New World* (see also René Chartrand and David Rickman, *The Spanish Army in North America, 1700-1793, 2011*).
For information on bidding on these paintings, please contact Crescent City Auction Gallery.

For the complete biography of Josef Salazar and a catalogue of his known works see Cybèle Gontar, ed., Salazar: Portraits of Influence in Spanish New Orleans, 1785-1802 (University of New Orleans Press and Ogden Museum of Southern Art, 2018).