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## DIEGO DE AGUILAR (TOLEDO, c.1558/1560–1624)

*Study for an Angel and a female Face*

c. 1595–1600

INK ON PAPER

94 X 190 MM

SIGNED: "DIEGO DE AGUILAR" AT THE UPPER RIGHT CORNER

PROVENANCE: PRIVATE COLLECTION, UK

Surviving information on the Toledan painter Diego de Aguilar is both scant and confused although progress has been made on the study of this artist in recent years.<sup>1</sup> The earliest known document regarding his activities dates to 1558 when a certain Diego de Aguilar gilded the border of the tomb of Cardinal Silíceo in the Colegio de Doncellas Nobles in Toledo. The latest document referring to the artist dates from 1624 when he made his will. This length of time (assuming the same person is referred to, he would have been born around 1530) led Angulo and Pérez Sánchez to suggest that two artists were involved, possibly a father and son.<sup>2</sup> Thus documents after 1582 would correspond to the artist now under consideration while the earlier ones would refer to his father.<sup>3</sup> Whatever the case the documents in question refer to similar types of work in both cases, essentially to the gilding and application of *estofado* to religious works and to the decoration of borders and margins of choir books.

The first information relating to Diego de Aguilar the Younger relates to his activities as a valuer of paintings by Alonso de Herrera, Blas de Prado and Luis de Velasco, a fact that implies some knowledge of painting. Notable among such activities was his valuation in 1585, working in collaboration with Blas de Prado, of a preparatory drawing by Nicolás de Vergara for a *Descent into Hell* that seems never to have been

painted.<sup>4</sup> Also interesting is the reference to a valuation in 1587 of the frame of El Greco's painting of *The Disrobing of Christ*.<sup>5</sup> With regard to his own artistic activities, his first documented work dates from 1597 when he was commissioned to paint and gild the monstrance in the parish church in Magán (Toledo). *The Baptism of Christ* in the monastery of San Clemente is Diego de Aguilar's earliest known painting.

Diego de Aguilar deployed an archaic style in his paintings, including the application of gold leaf to the figures' clothing. Works such as *The Baptism of Christ* and *Saint John on Patmos* (Toledo, monastery of San Clemente) reveal the influence of his activities as an illuminator and decorator in the careful rendering of details and precise technique. This is also evident in the taste for detail evident in his still lifes, explaining the comparison that has been made between him and Juan Sánchez Cotán.<sup>6</sup> All these characteristics are clearly evident in the paintings for the Franciscan convent of the Conception in Toledo.

The present unpublished drawing is executed in pen and sepia ink and is clearly inscribed "diego de aguil" at the upper right. It includes a study for the figure of an angel as well as a rapid sketch of a female face on the left. Although no other drawings by this artist are known the attribution is quite clear. The signature, for example, is written in the same sepia ink as the rest of the drawing while the handwriting is



Diego de Aguilar, *The Virgin presenting the Chasuble to Saint Ildefonso with Saints John the Baptist, Leocadia, Catherine and Agnes*. Toledo, Museo Santa Cruz

similar to those on documents relating to the artist published by Isabel Mateo and Amelia López-Yarto.<sup>7</sup>

The present drawing is thus an art-historical document of outstanding importance given the scarcity of late 16<sup>th</sup>- and early 17<sup>th</sup>-century Toledan drawings. In addition, it may be a preparatory sketch for the painting of *The Virgin presenting the Chasuble to Saint Ildefonso with Saints John the Baptist, Leocadia, Catherine and Agnes* (c. 1595-1600. Toledo, Museo de Santa Cruz), which would also allow for the definite attribution of that painting to Diego de Aguilar and not Sánchez Cotán, as has been suggested.<sup>8</sup> In comparing the two works it is evident that there are certain similarities between the present angel and the one in the upper left corner of the painting, although there are also differences in the position of the wings and arms. The fact that the pose is slightly different in the final work suggests that this may be a preliminary idea which Diego de Aguilar then modified in some respects in the final painting.

In addition to the figure of the angel, Saint Leocadia was also the subject of a preparatory study: the woman's face lightly sketched through a few lines that appears in the present drawing at the lower left is similar to the one in the final painting. Its oval shape and slight tilt to the right suggests that this is a first idea for Saint Leocadia.

Finally, the drawing is executed with enormous technical mastery. The agitated but firm, confident line used to depict the angel reveals an artist capable of a more modern approach in contrast to the style used in his paintings. This is the case in drawings by other contemporary painters such as Luis de Velasco and Blas de Prado, which are of enormous merit, their outlines and forms clearly defined and quite different in style to the final paintings. Diego de Aguilar's skills as a draughtsman suggest that he may have been familiar with the techniques of some of the Italian paintings summoned to Spain by Philip II to work on the Alcázar in Madrid and at El Escorial.

1 A fundamental text is the one by Mateo Gómez and López-Yarto Elizalde (2003), pp. 15-46.

2 Angulo and Pérez Sánchez (1972), pp. 13-17. This theory was subsequently corroborated by Mateo Gómez and López-Yarto Elizalde (2003), p. 23.

3 Mateo Gómez and López-Yarto Elizalde (2003), p. 23. In contrast, Angulo and Pérez Sánchez set that date at 1579.

4 Angulo and Pérez Sánchez (1972), p. 16.

5 Ceán Bermúdez (1800), Vol. I, p. 7. Ceán mistakenly referred to him as Diego de Aguilera.

6 See Pérez Sánchez (1996), p. 141.

7 See Mateo Gómez and López-Yarto Elizalde (2003), p. 24.

8 Angulo and Pérez Sánchez (1972), p. 14, were the first to attribute the painting to Diego de Aguilar, albeit tentatively given that the style is close to Cotán's early religious compositions. Mateo Gómez and López-Yarto Elizalde (2003), pp. 31 and 35-36, also support the attribution to Aguilar.

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