

Carlos Vázquez Úbeda, *Mozos de escuadra (Catalan Police Arresting Gypsies)*
Ciudad Real 1869 – 1944 Barcelona

oil on canvas
78 3/8 by 97 1/4 inches (199 by 247 cm)
signed and dated at the lower left: 'Carlos VAZQUEZ-/1906'

- provenance: Musée de Luxembourg, Paris, 1907;
Private collection, Argentina, 1908;
Private collection, 1984 – 2017
- exhibited: Expositión General de Bellas Artes, Madrid, 1906, no. 1249.
Salon de la Société des Artistes Français, Paris, 1907, no. 1590.
Exposicion Universal del Centenario de Buenos Aires, 1908.
- literature: André Pératé, "Les Salons de 1907: La Peinture au Salon des Artistes Français," *Gazette des Beaux Arts*, June 1907, p. 453, ill.
"Vázquez, Úbeda (Carlos)," *Enciclopedia Universal Ilustrada*, Bilbao and Madrid, 1929, vol. 67, pp. 387-389, ill.
Joaquín Ciervo, *Los Grandes Artistas Contemporáneos: Carlos Vázquez*, Barcelona, 1932, pp. 97-98, ill.
Elizabeth du Gué Trapier, *Catalogue of Paintings (19th and 20th Centuries) in the Collection of the Hispanic Society of America*, New York, 1932, vol. 1, p. 511.
Cien Años de Pintura en España y Portugal (1830-1930), Madrid, 1988-93, vol. XI, p. 190.
- note: Carlos Vázquez Úbeda (fig. 1) was one of the best known and most successful Spanish painters of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He was born at Ciudad Real. His father, the son of a general, was a notary and his mother, Matilde Úbeda, from whom he took his last name, was his first teacher of drawing. He then studied in Madrid at the Escuela de Bellas Artes beginning in 1886, but soon went to Paris where he worked for four years under the academic painter Léon Bonnat, who, since he had trained in Madrid, favored Spanish students. Vázquez began exhibiting at the Paris Salon in 1893. His works were very favorably received, as there still existed in France a taste for all things Spanish. Forsaking landscapes, Vázquez focused in great part on portraying indigenous Spaniards, especially those from the Valley of Anso, a remote area in the Pyrenees Mountains between Pamplona and Huesca, where the people wore picturesque, old-fashioned costumes. These regional genre subjects (figs. 2-7), including gypsies and flamenco dancers, won him medals and fame. In 1898 the painter returned to Spain and settled in Barcelona. There he frequented the literary café Els Quatre Gats made famous by the presence of the younger artists Pablo Picasso, Ramon Casas, and Santiago Rusiñol. But Vázquez was also friendly with such contemporaries as Joaquín Sorolla, who was best man at his wedding. In addition to his genre paintings, Vázquez produced book illustrations, posters, and did some portraits, including in 1926 one of King Alfonso XIII (figs. 8a-b). In 1914 Vázquez was elected a corresponding member of New York's Hispanic Society of America, where two of his works were presented by its founder, Archer M. Huntington, – *The Honeymoon in the Valley of Anso*, of 1911, which had won a gold medal at the Paris Salon, and a *Self-Portrait* of 1913 (figs. 9-10).¹ He never travelled to America, but his 1908 painting *The Mother in Law* (fig. 7a) was acquired by William Randolph Hearst, and that same year *Going to the Fair at Salamanca* (fig. 7b) was shown in the San Francisco World's Fair. Vázquez spent his long career in Spain and France, where he was made a

member of the Legion of Honor, and he continued to work assiduously until his death while painting in his studio on August 31, 1944.

The present impressive painting, which rightly may be called Vázquez's masterpiece, was executed and exhibited in Madrid in 1906. It gained the artist the appointment as *Caballero de la Orden de Alfonso XII*, and it was shown the next year at the Paris Salon. There the title had appended to it a French translation – “*gendarmes Catalans*” – and it earned him a silver medal. According to several sources, the painting was acquired by the French State for the Musée de Luxembourg.² Writing in the Salon review in the *Gazette de Beaux Arts*, where the work was illustrated, André Pératé noted the realistic landscape background and described the subject as “the *gendarmes Catalans* escorting a friendly couple of rogues of whom the faces are a poem, no less than their vividly colored costumes.” The critic seems to have missed the rather pointed, underlying message of discrimination which is being portrayed here. Set before the mountainous landscape of Barcelona, the scene shows three pompous *mozos* (policemen), in their overly elaborate uniforms and with their weapons prominent, who have caught two gypsy smugglers and seem to be either escorting them out of town or taking them to jail followed by their sad dog. These *Mozos de Escudara*, who were themselves often gypsies, were a special police force that had existed since the 18th century for the express purpose of dealing with gypsies.³

Joaquín Ciervo in his brief 1932 monograph on the artist chose to provide for the painting a little scenario. He described the arrested gypsies as from Alcalá – the man “sullen and impassive like a pharaoh,” the woman, a pickpocket, who utters untranslatable curses in gypsy argot.⁴ The two gypsies are at the center of the composition and look directly out at the viewer with grim expressions. The dark skinned man, a cigarette dangling in his mouth, carries a bag possibly concealing his loot. The intense woman in her brilliantly patterned dress holds her sombrero by her side. Her yellow scarf is flamboyantly wound around her neck. Like Carmen, she seems someone not to be trifled with!

According to the entry on Vázquez Úbeda in the *Enciclopedia Universal Ilustrada*, the year after entering the collection of the French State, this painting was sent to an exhibition in Buenos Aires, Argentina.⁵ Apparently it was never returned to France, as it appears sometime later in an Argentinian collection. At the same time as he painted this large work, the artist also produced a small pastel of the subject (fig. 11).⁶ Then in 1937, probably for an extensive retrospective exhibition of his work held that year in Norway, Vázquez painted a smaller, somewhat less detailed oil version of the composition (fig. 12), perhaps using the earlier pastel as his model. This later version has been titled either *La gitana presa* (*The Arrested Gypsies*) or *La detenida* (*The Detainees*).⁷ Dating from the same time is also another variation of the theme, which shows just a gypsy woman with a dog detained by the two Catalan policemen (fig. 13).⁸

Vázquez's paintings, with their attention to the details of traditional garb worn by rural types may recall the folkloric paintings by his fellow Spanish painter Ignacio Zuloaga, but, as he shows in this work, he was able to add an element of social commentary to the purely ethnographic elements.

¹ See Marcus Burke in Priscilla E. Muller, *From Goya to Sorolla*, New York, 2005, pp.104-105.

² *Enciclopedia Universal Ilustrada*, vol. 67, p. 389 and Trapier, 1932, p.511.

³ Oterino Cervelló, *Historia de la Guardia Civil: Mozos de escuadro*, with a reproduction of Vázquez's later version of the painting, online resource.

⁴ Ciervo, 1932, p. 98.

⁵ *Enciclopedia Universal Ilustrada*, vol. 67, p. 389.

⁶ Sold as “Escorting the Prisoners,” at Sotheby's, London, November 23, 1988, no. 150.

⁷ It is 39.8 x 52.4 in. and has appeared in the following auctions in Spain: Ansorena, Madrid, June 30, 2003, no. 340a; September 30, 2003, no. 90; December 18, 2015, no. 502; and September 19, 2016, no. 579.

⁸ Auctioned at Ansorena, Madrid, June 30, 2003, no. 340b and September 30, 2003, no. 91; and Subastas Segre, Madrid, July 3, 2003, no. 44309. It has also been published with the title *L'urraça* (*The Magpie*), see *Enciclopedia Universal Ilustrada*, 1929, vol. 67, p. 386.