Sensing the Divine - Touch and tactility in Francisco de Zurbarán's Christ and the Virgin in the House at Nazareth.

Francisco de Zurbarán's (1598- 1664) *Christ and the Virgin in the House at Nazareth* presents the young Jesus having just pricked his finger while weaving a crown of thorns; he sits in silence reflecting on his wound (Fig.1). His mother, looking up from her sewing, contemplates his pain, as if aware of the suffering that lies ahead, causing tears to roll gently down her face. A heavenly aura pierces the darkness of the house, illuminating both Jesus and his mother, and a number of deliberately placed symbolic objects, their meditative, still-life quality contributing to the emotional intensity of the scene. Zurbarán, with his highly original iconography, provides a tangible representation of life in the house at Nazareth, infused with a spiritual vision of suffering to come. And, while we perceive the image with the sense organ of our eyes, it is to our sense of touch that he makes his greatest appeal: through the acute prick of the thorn, the moist sensation of an uncontrollable tear, the weight of heavy robes against the body, and the earthenware bowl precariously filled to the brim with water.

Scholars attribute the creation of this image to the period between 1631 and 1640 when Zurbarán was arguably the dominant force among the artists of Seville.[1] The circumstances surrounding its commission, as with many other facts concerning Zurbarán's life as an artist, have yet to be discovered. However, Zurbarán must surely have had success with this canvas as there are a number of extant copies by his own hand and by his followers, and the

[1]Julian Gallego and Jose Guidol, *Zurbarán*, (New York, 1997), p.97.

image become known throughout the Hispanic world (Fig.2).[2] As with many of Zurbarán's works, the picture has spent much of its life in relative obscurity; and, it was only following the work's eventual sale to the Cleveland Museum of Art in 1960 that it was definitively ascribed to Zurbarán's hand and given greater critical and scholarly attention.

Putting aside the uncertainties surrounding this painting's history, the catalogue of the 1988 landmark Zurbarán exhibition held in New York and Paris declared *The House of Nazareth* to be 'a signal masterpiece' and 'one of the finest paintings to emerge from Spain's Golden Age'.[3] The leading Zurbarán scholar Odile Delenda has gone further in arguing that this canvas shows that 'Zurbarán equals the greatest painters of the seventeenth century'.[4] Yet, despite this recognition, the visual and intellectual sources of this most unusual composition remain a matter of speculation. To date there has been no critical exploration of the central narrative event of this image, that is the wound from the crown of thorns, and, how this sensation of touch mediates the viewer's physical and spiritual response to the image. This paper will therefore reassess the compositional sources that Zurbarán may have used in composing the work, especially those drawn from Northern European prints. It will consider how the image and its sources relate to the religious and intellectual environment in early seventeenth-century Seville, and lastly, how Zurbarán exploited the sense of touch in creating works of such vivacity and devotion.

[2] Odile Delenda and Max Borobia, *Zurbarán A New Perspective*, exhibition catalogue, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza (Madrid, 2015), p.112.
[3] Jeannine Baticle, *Zurbarán*, exhibition catalogue, The Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, 1987), p.260.
[4] Delenda, *Zurbarán A New Perspective,* p.112.

Iconography and Zurbarán's visual sources

In Andalusian painting Zurbarán appears to be the first artist to tackle the image of the young Jesus pricking himself on a crown of thorns in the presence of his mother. A distinct departure from the more usual iconography of *The House of Nazareth* with Jesus, Mary and Joseph present; and, even this traditional depiction of the Holy Family was not a common theme in Spanish painting.[5] However, despite the novelty of Zurbarán's subject, it is still possible to recognise what Benito Navarrete Prieto has termed the artist's 'elaborate working method', which involved 'taking considerable time to select the models and sources on which to base his compositions.'[6] Among the most common of these sources were Flemish and German engravings that Zurbarán would have been able to access from the notable collections of fellow painters and patrons such as Francisco Pacheco (1564-1644) and the Duke of Alcalá (1583-1637). As his fortunes as an artist improved, Zurbarán was also able to build his own stock of prints, purchased from the many Flemish merchants who resided in Seville.[7]

In this context scholars have suggested that the figure of Mary in *The House of Nazareth* is based on Albrecht Dürer's (1471-1528) enigmatic print, *Melancholia* (Fig.3).[8] The similarity of the posture of the seated Virgin with Dürer's winged figure in her flowing garment is unmistakable, and, given the fame of this print since its creation in 1514, it is highly likely that the image would be known to Zurbarán and to the audience who saw *The House of*

[5] Baticle, *Zurbarán*, p.260.
[6] Delenda, *Zurbarán A New Perspective*, p.46.
[7] Delenda, *Zurbarán A New Perspective*, p.29.
[8] Zahira Veliz, 'A Painter's Technique: Zurbarán's the Holy House of Nazareth', *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* Vol.68, No.8 (1981). p.272.

*Naz*areth. Moreover, the tone of the print, as its name suggests, is melancholic, a perfect reflection of the emotional state of Zurbarán's virgin.

A further facet of Dürer's print that contributed to his enduring popularity is the array of objects that surround the figure of Melancholy, providing textures of stone, metal, glass and wood, with pointed shapes, spheres, and grids, with saws, nails and even a calliper. The range of tactile elements that Dürer uses is a tour de force of the engravers art and equally finds an echo in the still-life objects that are so deliberately placed around *The House of Nazareth*.

An interest in still life painting as a genre had already emerged in Spain through the art of Juan Sánchez Cotán (1560-1627) and Juan van der Hamen (1596-1631). Their work focused on fruit and other foodstuffs, usually displayed on a simple ledge or shelf against a dark background. This gave their compositions an aesthetic simplicity, which has often been read as a sign of religious symbolism and intent. Sánchez Cotán eventually entered a Carthusian monastery, which has reinforced this reading of his work.

Looking at the objects in The House of Nazareth, Zurbarán appears to follow in this contemplative tradition through his fascination with their tactile qualities and what has been called his 'secret alchemy'[9] in imbuing these scrupulously observed elements from everyday life with a profound mysticism. The bolt of cloth that sits on Mary's lap, a symbol of her son's future shroud, is perfectly observed as you would expect from Zurbarán, the

[9] Delenda, *Zurbarán A New Perspective*, p.29.

son of a haberdasher. The two doves at her feet and the lilies mingled with roses in the freestanding vase bring to mind Mary's purification in the temple and her future suffering at the foot of the cross.

One object that the existing literature has paid little attention to is the earthenware bowl full of water. In this detail, the Cleveland picture (Fig.4) differs in form from other versions by Zurbarán's hand (Fig.5), but they all portray a type of ware called a búcaro. These objects made from a rare type of red clay were produced in Estremoz in Portugal and in Tonalá in Mexico.[10] What makes these wares remarkable is not just the beauty and variation of their tactile shapes and their polished surfaces, but that they also possessed a scent that was used to fragrance interiors. It was also believed that contact with these pots could purify water and small amounts of broken pots were consumed as a remedy for gastric disorders.[11] These búcaro wares were therefore objects that appealed to a range of sense experiences, and nowhere is this more clearly seen than in the works of Juan Bautista de Espinosa (active 1619-1659), such as his *Still Life with Silver Gilt Salvers* and his *Still Life with Flowers and a Ceramic Fountain* (Fig.6)(Fig.7). Patricia Padgett Lea has argued that the búcaro fountain in the latter painting engages all of the five senses, with touch represented by the snails who have left their shells in search of the fountain's purifying water.[12] In this context the búcaro bowl in *The House of Nazareth* would therefore serve as a symbolic reminder of Christ's

[10] Patricia Padgett Lea, '*Clay Treasure: The Búcaro in Francisco de Zurbarán's Christ and the Virgin in the House at Nazareth*', academia.edu (2016), p.5. https://www.academia.edu/34398551/CLAY_TREASURE_1_CLAY_TREASURE_THE_B%C3%9ACARO_IN_FRANCISCO_DE_ZURBAR%C3%81NS_CHRIST_AND_THE_VIRGIN_IN_THE_HOUSE_AT_NAZARETH (accessed 04/06/2020).
[11] Lea, *Clay Treasure: The Búcaro in Francisco de Zurbarán's Christ and the Virgin in the House at Nazareth,* p.6.
[12] Lea, *Clay Treasure: The Búcaro in Francisco de Zurbarán's Christ and the Virgin in the House at Nazareth,* p.27.

baptism, as a vehicle for a painterly display of great verisimilitude and as an object with the power to purify everything that it touched.

One aspect that is absent from the published literature on this painting is the identification of any source material for the figure of Jesus. It is accepted that the image of the child Jesus preparing a crown of thorns is a prefiguring of his suffering as an adult, and this prophetic reference to the passion is a tool used by Zurbarán who largely avoided painting scenes of the passion itself, other than a small number of isolated crucifixions.[13] Looking again at print sources of the passion narrative Zurbarán's depiction of the seated child Jesus shares many stylistic similarities with the seated figure in *The Mocking of Jesus* in Lucas van Leyden's (1494-1533) print of 1521 (Fig.8)(Fig.9). This print had in fact been copied by the Flemish engraver Jan Harmensz. Muller (1571-1628) in around 1620, and, it may have been this version that Zurbarán had access to. Setting aside the difference in the age of Jesus in each image, he adopts the same hunched position, head slightly bowed, his right leg further forward, with his right foot just visible under the hem of a long robe, the folds of which drape in a similar fashion. In van Leyden's image Jesus is blindfolded, deprived of sight to intensify the impact of the blows and pokes from the hands that whirl around him. In *The House of Nazareth* Jesus's eyes are cast down towards his wound, denying the viewer sight of his external expression, making the inward emotion all the more poignant.

Returning to Benito Navarrete Prieto observations on Zurbarán's approach to composition, he argues that the artist's genius is the degree to which he is able to take existing visual

[13] Delenda, *Zurbarán A New Perspective*, p.18.

models and then 'rework them in order to conceal, disguise or transform the source'. The artistic invention therefore lies both in the 'act of concealment' and the degree to which Zurbarán moves away from these models in creating his unique visual language.[14] In light of this argument the use of prints such as *Melancholia* and *The Mocking of Jesus*, richly imbued with the sense of touch and tactility, would have provided fertile ground from which to develop both the imagery and message of *The House of Nazareth*. The addition of the carefully chosen still life objects serving to underline further the sense experience that Zurbarán wished to convey.

Religious sources and visionary experience

The unusual iconography of *The House of Nazareth* has also given rise to significant speculation concerning a literary or religious source of the image, ranging from Andalusian poetry and song, to Carthusian devotional practices and the writings of undocumented mystics, but as yet no firm attribution has been established.[15] However, a recurring theme in Zurbarán scholarship is his near total focus on religious commissions and his closeness to certain religious orders present in and around Seville.

Scholars such as Martin Soria, writing in the 1950s, have tried to establish a link between Zurbarán and the quietist spiritual movement called the *alumbrados*, which was centred in Extremadura, the region of Zurbarán's birth.[16] During the artist's early career, the *alumbrados* became active in Seville until their suppression by the church in 1630. The

[14] Delenda, *Zurbarán A New Perspective*, p.46.
[15] Baticle, *Zurbarán*, p.260.
[16] Martin Soria, *The Paintings of Zurbarán* (London, 1953), p.23.

alumbrados, like other quietist religious movements in early modern Europe, emphasised the importance of contemplation and passivity in prayer, and Soria has argued that this belief can be found in the intense mysticism and stillness of so much of Zurbarán's religious output. Other writers have focused on Zurbarán's close and productive relationships with Seville's Dominican, Mercedarian and Carthusian communities, leading Paul Guinard to call the artist 'a painter of monks and a monastic painter'.[17] However, no direct evidence has been unearthed to attest to Zurbarán's personal religious beliefs and there must clearly be a danger in over-interpreting an artist's work for certain religious institutions as a sign of a particular monastic personality.

The facts that can be established show that Zurbarán was married three times during his life and was the father of ten children. He owned a significant number of properties in Llerena and Seville and at the height of his career ran a large and successful workshop. All of this would tend to weigh against the picture of an overtly 'monastic painter'. It is also clear from the documentary evidence of his major commissions that monastic patrons reserved to themselves total control over the subject matter and religious orthodoxy of Zurbarán's work.[18]

Despite the difficulty in making an argument for Zurbarán's work based on his personal beliefs, what is without doubt is that Spain in the early decades of the seventeenth century remained an orthodox Catholic society. Its identity had been forged through the Christian 'reconquest' of the peninsular by its catholic monarchs from a pluralist past, with the final

[17] Jonathan Brown, *Images and Ideas in Seventeenth-Century Spanish Painting* (New Jersey, 1978), p.127.
[18] Brown, *Images and Ideas in Seventeenth-Century Spanish Painting*, p.64.

expulsion of the *morisco* population taking place in 1609. In the defence of the church from the Protestant Reformation Spain had produced the new, militant religious order of the Jesuits under St Ignatius Loyola. New spiritual voices also appeared in the form of St Teresa of Avila and her spiritual director St John of the Cross, who were intent on restoring the harsher, former ascetism of their Carmelite order.

One aspect of this reinvigorated religious orthodoxy that would have a profound influence on the course of Spanish art was the privilege given by the religious writers to naturalistic representation and its ability to reflect religious experience. In his 1548 *Exercitia spiritualia*, St Ignatius of Loyola instructed his followers when contemplating a divine scene 'to see with the sight of the imagination the corporeal place where the thing is found', encouraging them to see the presence of the divine in everyday objects and experiences. He then went further in providing a meditation explaining how each of the five senses can mediate the pains of Hell. In his description he begins by privileging the sense of sight, writing:

'*The First Point* will be to see with the eyes of the imagination the huge fires and, so to speak, the souls within the bodies full of fire.'

The mediation ends with a vivid portrayal of touch:

'*The Fifth Point*. By my sense of touch, I will feel how the flames touch the souls and burn them'.[19]

[19] *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius*, trans. George E. Ganss, S.J. (Chicago, 1992), pp.46-7.

It is interesting to note that in the hierarchy of the senses, sight appears to exist within the intellect and the imagination. Whereas for touch St. Ignatius uses the word 'feel', emphasising the corporeal nature of the experience. A corporeality that is fully present in the pain felt by the Christ Child portrayed in *The House of Nazareth*.

Writing only a few decades after St. Ignatius, it was St John of the Cross, who had himself trained as an artist, that most profoundly addressed the nexus of art and religious experience. In his work The Ascent of Mount Carmel, a short eight stanza poem accompanied by a very lengthy exegesis published in 1618, John is direct in expressing the role of the senses in acquiring the knowledge of God, writing in Chapter XVII of his commentary: 'Since knowledge is acquired through the Sense, God, to achieve his work gently and to lift the soul to supreme knowledge, must begin by touching the low state and extreme of the senses.'[20] In this action the religious artefact is a means to this end, allowing the contemplation of God, with the consequence that 'we should consequently choose those images that are more lifelike and the move the will more to devotion.'[21] In the stanzas of his short poem John also uses the language and imagery of touch to express the ultimate goal of union with the divine when in the seventh stanza he writes:

'The breeze blew from the turret As I parted his locks;
With his gentle hand he wounded my neck
And caused all my sense to be suspended.'[22]

[20] Peter Tyler, *St. John of the Cross* (London, 2010), p.104.
[21] Tyler, *St. John of the Cross*, p.108.
[22] Saint John of the Cross, *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, trans. E. Allison Peers (New York, 2008), p.10.

This text, along with much of John's work, was widely published and debated during the formative years of Zurbarán's career, and it would certainly have been known in some of the religious houses in which he worked. In this context it is worth noting the insistence in the text of the sense of touch in the 'locks' of the beloved's hair and the wound from a hand that causes a pain capable of stilling the senses, resonates with many of the tactile qualities of *The House of Nazareth*. This is not to suggest that Zurbarán was making any direct claim to portray John's mystical experience in his painting, but that this language shares the intensity with which Zurbarán invokes the sensation of the wound from the crown of thorns. Zurbarán is inviting his viewer to participate through the practice of his art into the visionary experience of *The House of Nazareth*.

In reading *The House of Nazareth* as a visionary experience it is possible to see shared approaches with *The Vision of Saint Peter Nolasco*, which Zurbarán painted in 1629 for the Convent of la Merced de Calzada (Fig.10). In both images, despite the presence of furniture and naturalistic protagonists, there are no firm dimensions to the space represented, no clear ground on which to locate or reveal the position of either the artist or the viewer. The images are both lit entirely from a heavenly light source, a feature accentuated in *The House of Nazareth* by the presence at the back of an image of a window like opening which emits only the gloomy representation of a darkened sky. These effects leave what Victor Stoichita terms 'a margin of ambiguity' between the visionary and the real.

Despite the absence of a clear literary or biblical text underpinning the composition of *The House of Nazareth*, as a painting of a religious subject this work was always bound to reflect something of the spiritual concerns of both its patron and its creator. Zurbarán's decision to

focus the narrative on a moment of acute physical pain, yet with the two protagonists appearing to be in total silence, gives this work an unmistakable meditative and mystical character. A space in which the viewer is invited to experience the sensation, even if the sense is that of touch, the most corporeal and thought by many to be the lowest form of the five senses.

The Allegory of the Five Senses

Any work of art appealing to the senses in the early seventeenth century would not only have to negotiate the religious context in which it was created. It would also have to respond to a philosophical debate on the nature of the senses stretching back to antiquity. In Aristotle's (385-323) *De Anima*, his inquiry into the soul, touch, being a procession of all sentient beings sits at the bottom of the hierarchy of senses. Sight, by which the mind 'sees' the world, and is thus aligned with the act of thinking, sits at the top of the hierarchy. However, touch cannot be easily dismissed, for in Aristotle's thought he also posits that the senses derive their meaning from 'contact' with the objects they are sensing. Touch therefore lies at the heart of our ability both to sense the material world and to understand that we are the beings doing the sensing, creating what modern philosophers have termed 'a causal link between practical intelligence and tactility'.[23]

Aristotle's arguments, along with the thought of other philosophers such as Plato (428?-328?) and Plotinus (204-270), continued to fuel intellectual speculation on the role of the

[23] Pascal Massie, 'Touching, Thinking, Being: The Sense of Touch in Aristotle's De anima and Its Implications. Minerva' – *An Internet Journal Of Philosophy* 17 (2013), p74.

senses in the academies of the Italian Renaissance. The Tuscan humanist and philosopher Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499), argued in his 1474 *Platonic Theology* that beauty could only be enjoyed through the 'higher' senses of the mind and the eyes and the ears. A generation later, a more orthodox philosopher Agostino Nifo (1473-1545) countered that all five senses were capable of transmitting beauty to the soul. He cited Ovid's (43BC-17/18AD) description in the *Metamorphoses* of the nymph Galatea, who was said to be 'softer than swan's down and curds', as evidence that the sensation of touch could indeed provide a direct experience of divine beings.[24]

Alongside the philosophical debate on the nature of the five senses, the visual arts provided a number of representations of the senses, many of them appearing in popular allegorical prints across the sixteenth century. These print series were produced by leading artists and engravers and would almost certainly have reached Zurbarán and his circle in Seville. Engravers whose series of prints on the five senses were particularly influential on the development of this subject's iconography were Georg Pencz (1500-1550), Cornelius Cort (1533-1578) or Adriaen Colleart (1560-1618), all of whom produced images focused on the attributes of the five senses personified by female figures.

In Georg Pencz's engraving of *Touch*, thought to be from around 1544, he uses the image of a semi-nude woman weaving to provide a visceral sense of tactility as she works the threads of the loom with her carefully observed fingers (Fig.11). The lower half of the woman's body is loosely wrapped in a large cloth, the weight of folds of the drapery pressing against her

[24] Jill Kraye, 'Ficino in the Firing Line' in *Masilio Ficino: His Theology, His Philosophy, his Legacy* ed. Michael Allen (Leiden, 2001), pp.383- 384.

leg. Although the sense of touch as the lowest form of the senses has often been associated with sensuality and carnal desire, Sharon Assaf has argued that in Pencz's image the semi-nude female figure is instead a model of virtue, the figure's downward gaze focused on the virtuous industriousness of her weaving.[25] The allusion to the feel of fine threads is heightened by the presence of a spider's web in the corner of the print. In this early treatment of touch it is impossible not to recall the weight of drapery that Zurbarán uses to give flesh to the body Mary in *The House of Nazareth* or the allusion to the feel of fine threads in Mary's sewing, all mediating the illusion of reality.

This iconographic formula was further developed with the publication in 1561 of Cornelius Cort's series after paintings by Frans Floris (1517-1570) (Fig.12). In this image the figure of touch is sitting on the seashore, the spider's web is again present in the branches of a gnarly tree, along with other tactile illusions such as a fisherman's net, the polished surface of a tortoise, and a bird pecking at the hand of the figure of Touch, who appears to wince at the painful sensation. The image is accompanied by the text '*tactus sensorium per totum corpus expansum est, ac proinde etiam organum*' which can be translated as 'the sense of touch is spread over the entire body, and therefore it is also its organ', possibly a response to the Aristotelian view that the sense of touch underpins the whole embodied human existence.[26]

Cort's prints had a profound impact on the iconography used by Flemish artists and engravers in the decades that followed. Some artists such as Hendrik Goltzius (1558-1617)

[25] Sharon Assaf, 'The Ambivalence of the Sense of Touch in Early Modern Prints', *Renaissance and Reformation*, New Series 29, no.1 (2005), p.88.

[26] Abbie Garrington, *Haptic Modernism* (Edinburgh, 2013), p.18.

developed the sensual aspects of these images, so for example the sense of touch would come to represented by two lovers in contemporary clothing exchanging a kiss. However, Adriaen Collaert took another direction when around 1590 he engraved and published a series of the five senses after images by Maarten der Vos (Fig.13). In this series each allegorical figure, replete with the now well-established symbolic attributes, is set against biblical stories drawn from the Book of Genesis and the Gospel of John. There are also Latin quatrains below each image penned by the humanist poet and lexicographer Cornelis Kiliaan (1528-1607) linking the symbolic elements to specific biblical tropes. While the choice of biblical stories in this series relates to the fall of man and the saving power of Jesus, the connection between each story and the allegorical figures they accompany remains the subject of much scholarly debate.[27] However, what is apparent from this print series, containing both allegories and biblical exegesis, is that the representation of the senses as a genre of images was capable of speaking to the religious thought and imagination of Reformation and Counter-Reformation Europe.

The essentially profane nature of many of these print series ensured little direct copying by the painters of Catholic Spain, leaving Flemish artists such as Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640) and Jan Brueghel the Elder (1568-1625) to provide such works for Spanish collections. However, this material provided a rich visual vocabulary for Spanish artists to explore, and the depiction of acute pain, fine threads and tactile surfaces associated with touch in these prints resonates with a number of the effects that Zurbarán explored in *The House of Nazareth*.

[27] Amanda K. Herrin, 'Narratives of Origin in Netherlandish Art: Maarten de Vos & Late Sixteenth-Century Print Design as Visual Exegesis' (PhD Thesis, The Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, 2016), p.90.

Looking beyond the medium of prints, artists also approached the allegorical representation of the five senses through painting. One near contemporary of Zurbarán who explored this subject was Jusepe de Ribera (1591-1652). Born in Játivia in the province of Valencia, he went onto spend most of his career in Italy, eventually settling in Naples from 1616 onwards. Despite his absence abroad his works were known in Seville, in part due to the patronage of the 3rd Duke of Alcalá.

Ribera's 1615 picture of *The Sense of Touch,* part of a series painted for the Spanish patron Pedro Cosina, depicts a blind scholar examining the head of an antique sculpture with his hands; a painted portrait which is of no use to the blind man lies discarded on the table next to him(Fig.14). In this composition Ribera is exploring how the blind man can 'see' through the touch of his fingertips. Edward Payne has argued that in this and in other notable works Ribera has abandoned the hierarchy of senses found in the prints of Pencz and instead accepts a fundamental equality between the senses, particularly in their ability to experience corporeal pain. [28]

In this description of touch Ribera, who had been heavily influenced by the naturalism of Caravaggio during his early years in Rome, invites the viewer to focus on the blind man's skin, the light accentuating his mass of wrinkles, his shiny cheeks and even the dirt beneath his fingernails. This focus on skin would become a major theme in much of Ribera's later work, leading Payne to conclude that for Ribera the 'significance of skin surpasses the realm

[28] Edward Payne, 'Violence and Corporeality in the Art of Jusepe de Ribera' (PhD Thesis, The Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, 2013), p.152.

of iconography and becomes bound up in the processes of constructing the figures' identity and crafting the physical object'. [29] In the more conservative religious climate of Seville the portrayal of flesh and skin had been rejected by art theorists such as Francisco Pacheco. However, Zurbarán's handling of drapery can be seen working in a similar way to Ribera's skin. For Zurbarán the careful observation of drapery, often painted from elaborate physical models, defines both physical and emotional character of his figures. In *The House of Nazareth*, the pull of Jesus's blue tunic elaborates the slight figure of the vulnerable young person beneath, while the sheer volume of Mary's dress weighs her down, as if it is itself part of her sorrowful premonition.

Finally, returning again to van Leyden's print of *The Mocking of Christ*, this image could itself be a study of the sense of touch equal to any of the later allegorical treatments, portrayed through the psychological violence of this biblical scene rather than the arcane language of classical antiquity. As a potential source for Zurbarán's composition, it displays the same power to move between sense experience and religious experience that is at the heart of *The House of Nazareth*.

Conclusion

The great scholar of Spanish Golden Age painting Jonathan Brown has described the art of Seville during the period when Zurbarán was in charge of one of its most successful workshops as 'the art of immediacy'. His argument focuses on the ability of artists such as

[29] Payne, 'Violence and Corporeality in the Art of Jusepe de Ribera', p.156.

Zurbarán to create works with 'spectacular realism, which made the familiar look new again, and increased the power of the spiritual message by appealing directly to their senses'.[30] There is a certainly a case for seeing *The House of Nazareth* with its carefully observed draperies and the tactile quality of its symbolic objects in these terms. But this also risks viewing these compositions and their painterly effects as little more than the emulation of the realism brought from Italy in the works of Caravaggio, tempered with the sobriety of Counter-Reformation Spain.

In looking closely at the iconography and sources of *The House of Nazareth*, a more complex mode of expression emerges. Drawing on ideas gathered from Flemish, allegorical and biblical printmaking, Zurbarán has invented an image of remarkable originality, fully imbued with his hallmark skill of painting with great vivacity. Yet, in focusing the work on a momentary sensation of pain Zurbarán has produced an image capable of speaking both to the spirituality of seventeenth century Spain and to a broader exploration of sense experience portrayed through art. Through his focus on touch *The House of Nazareth* Zurbarán moves beyond the pictorial representation of religious sentiment to a more direct visionary experience. For the religious viewer touch and tactility provides a pictorial language capable of transforming its spiritual content into a sensation of the divine.

[30] Jonathan Brown, *Painting In Spain 1500-1700* (Yale, 1991), p.135.

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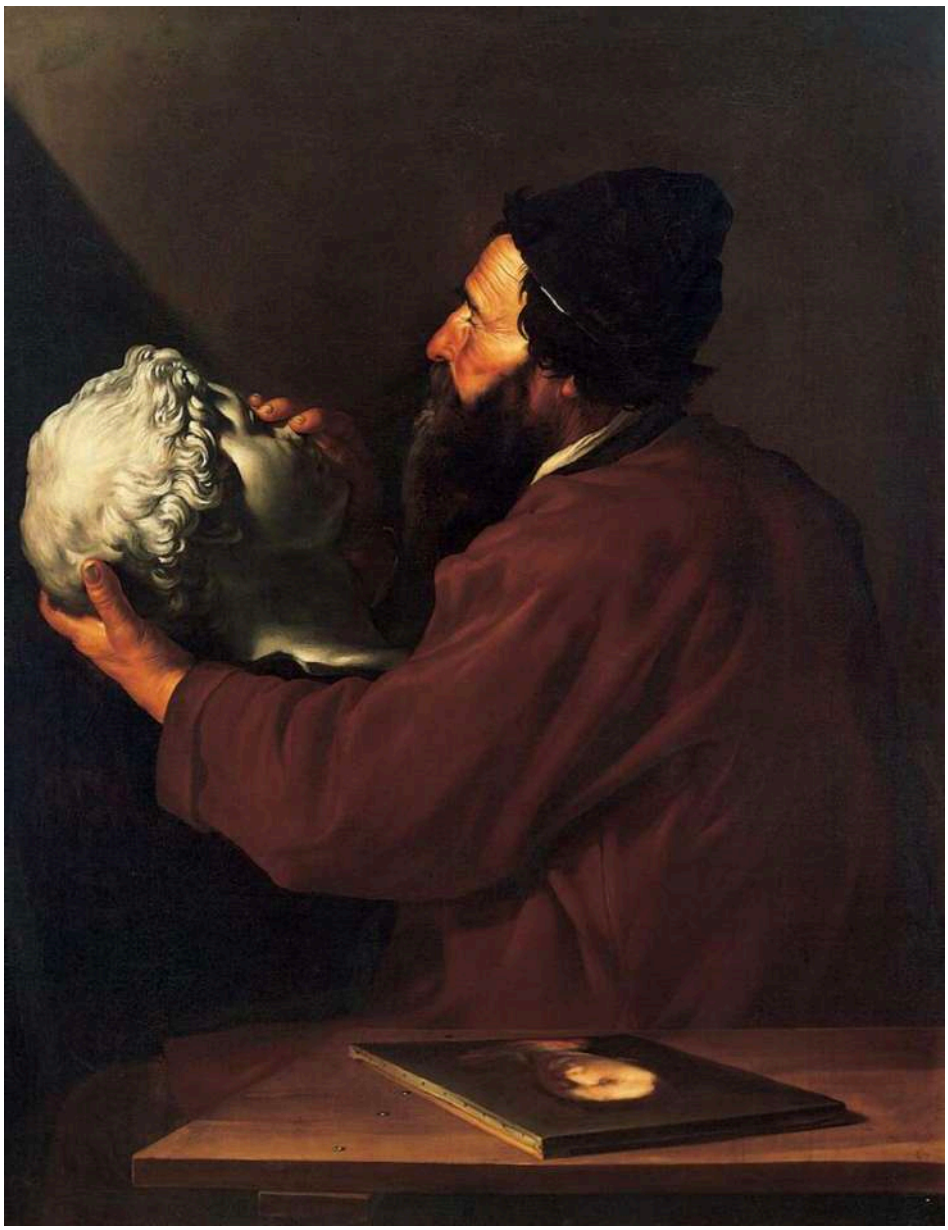

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