Las pinturas de Carducho en El Paular
Carducho’s paintings in El Paular

The Monastery of Santa María de El Paular is located at the valley that gives it its name, in Rascacielos, at the heart of ‘Sierra de Guadarrama’ National Park. The Monastery, as well as the National Park, constitute one of the most valuable examples of cultural and natural heritage in Madrid.
E l 29 de agosto de 1626 Vicente Carducho (h. 1576-1638) firmó un contrato para acometer la serie pictórica más completa y ambiciosa jamás realizada sobre la orden de los cartujos: un conjunto de cincuenta y seis lienzos de grandes dimensiones pensados para el claustro mayor de la cartuja de El Paular en Rascafría (Madrid). La serie se realizó entre 1626 y 1632 e ilustra la historia de la orden de los cartujos. Las grandes telas se concibieron como pinturas murales. Su autor era el artista más respetado y prestigioso de la corte madrileña. Pintor y autor los "Diálogos de la Pintura", el tratado artístico más importante del siglo XVII en España. Nacido en Florencia, se formó junto a su hermano Bartolomé en el Monasterio de El Escorial. Desde 1609 fue pintor del rey y se consagró a la pintura de historia, el género más apreciado. Como demuestra su serie en El Paular, supo diseñar composiciones de gran tamaño, para las que se valió de numerosas estampas y dibujos. Logró imprimir en sus lienzos un ritmo visual contenido por el classicismo tosco y el sentido pedagógico de los pintores escorialenses.

Las obras permanecieron dos siglos en El Paular, hasta la desamortización de 1835, es decir durante la expropiación de los bienes de las órdenes religiosas por parte del Estado. Formaron parte del Museo Nacional de Pintura y Escultura, ubicado en el

O n 29 August 1626 Vicente Carducho (ca.1576-1638) signed a contract to produce the most complete and ambitious pictorial series ever created for the Carthusian Order: a programme of 56 large-scale canvases designed for the main cloister of the Charterhouse of El Paular in Rascafría (Madrid). Painted between 1626 and 1632, the series depicts the history of the Carthusian Order from its founding by Saint Bruno of Cologne (1035-1101) to the martyrdom in the 15th and 16th centuries of members of some of its communities. Carducho, who conceived of his large-scale canvases as mural paintings, was one of the most highly esteemed and prestigious artists at the court in Madrid. A painter and the author of the Dialogues on Painting, the most important treatise on art written in 17th-century Spain, Carducho was born in Florence but trained together with his brother at the monastery of El Escorial (Madrid). In 1609 he became a court painter and devoted his activities to history painting, the most highly esteemed pictorial genre. As the series for El Paular demonstrates, Carducho was fully capable of devising large-scale compositions, which he prepared on the basis of numerous prints and drawings. His canvases combine the restrained visual rhythm of Tuscan classicism with the didactic approach typical of the El Escorial painters.
Madrid's convent of the Trinidad, in Atocha. In that museum, many canvases were restored following the criteria of the epoch, changing its original format, which ended in an arch of the middle of point. With the closing of the Trinidad Museum in 1872, it was moved to the Prado Museum. The large size (3.45 x 3.15 m) of the works made their exhibition and even storage difficult, so that they were distributed by different museums and institutions in Spain. In 2002, the Prado Museum began a process of recovery of the entire set which ended in 2006. With such a large intervention, not only has it been possible to stabilize the material, but also to recover the original vision of the total ensemble of the most important work ever done on the Cistercian Order.

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Carducho’s works remained at El Paular for around 200 years until the Disentailment of the monasteries in 1835 when the Spanish State expropriated the possessions of the religious Orders. The paintings entered the Museo Nacional de Pintura y Escultura, located in the monastery of the Trinidad in Atocha (Madrid). At that point many of the canvases were restored using methods accepted at the time and their original arched tops were also modified. On the closure of the Museo de la Trinidad in 1872, Carducho’s works entered the Museo del Prado. Their large size (3.45 x 3.15 m) meant that they were difficult to display or even store and they were consequently sent to different Spanish museums and institutions. In 2002, the Prado embarked on the restoration of the entire series, which was completed in 2006. This lengthy project has not only corrected material damage to the paintings but has once again allowed for an almost complete reading of the most important series ever produced on the Cistercian Order.

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La cartuja de El Paular en Rascafria (Madrid) había sido levantada bajo el patrocinio de Juan I de Castilla (1358-1390) y gozaba todavía del favor real cuando, en el reinado de Felipe IV (1605-65), se encargó al pintor florentino Vicente Carducho un ambicioso proyecto iconográfico para la decoración de las paredes del claustro. La llegada de la orden benedictina y el más reciente proceso de restauración y rehabilitación arquitectónica, llevado a cabo desde 1985 bajo el impulso de la Dirección General de Bellas Artes y Bienes Culturales y la recuperación y restauración de las pinturas por su titular, el Museo Nacional del Prado, han permitido que, desde 2011, las 52 pinturas dedicadas a la historia de la orden de los cartujos ocupen de nuevo el emplazamiento original, para el que habían sido creadas.

The Charterhouse of El Paular in Rascafria (Madrid) was constructed under the patronage of Juan I of Castile (1358-1390). It continued to enjoy royal favour when, during the reign of Philip IV (1605-65), the Florentine painter Vicente Carducho was commissioned to execute an ambitious pictorial programme for the decoration of the bays of the cloister. In the modern era, the installation of the Benedictine Order at the monastery, the more recent architectural restoration and remodelling of the building, which began in 1985 under the supervision of the Department of Fine Arts and Cultural Heritage, and the restoration of Carducho's paintings by the institution that now owns them, the Museo Nacional del Prado, has meant that since 2011 the 52 scenes of episodes from the history of the Carthusian Order have once again occupied the original location for which they were devised and painted.