"The Uniformity of a Distinctive National Character": Loops, Knots, and Bernardo de Gálvez's Calligraphic Equestrian Portrait

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This essay treats an extraordinary equestrian portrait of the New Spanish viceroy Bernardo de Gálvez created from little more than a looping, calligraphic line. Unique among viceregal painting, it has eluded definitive scholarly interpretation. A previously unexplored, printed calligraphic model is proposed. At stake, however, is not just source hunting but a reappraisal of the picture's intellectual context within a network of the period's renowned academicians and their thinking about handwriting. Moreover, new technical findings allow a revised dating of the picture in exposing the sitter's shifting identity. What emerges is a political reading of the portrait's original function as an act of deference to the Spanish crown and sign of investment in the renewal of Iberian culture's proper formation of imperial citizens—on both sides of the Atlantic. Ultimately, the essay thus points to the art-historical potential of wrestling with the history of writing, a domain often segregated from other visual arts but one that was critical for early modern artists and their audiences.

The New Spanish viceroy Bernardo de Gálvez (1746–86) stares out to meet the viewer's gaze from within what is otherwise a completely anomalous picture (fig. 1). For while his face, cravat, glove, and saddle ornaments are painted with illusionistic, three-dimensional detail, his muscular rearing steed and, indeed, the body of the viceroy himself are made with a line that sits flat against the picture plane. This thick but nimble white line swoops, swirls, and loops across the uniform jet-black ground. That stark binarism, black and white, augments the painting's conceit: that an image so forcefully three-dimensional, so lively and buoyant, could be created with nothing more than a seemingly unbroken line twirled across the picture's surface.

The painting boasts a grandiose singularity in the history of New Spanish art in more than one respect. At over seven feet in height, it towers over the viewer as by

Fig. 1
Fray Pablo de Jesús and Padre San Gerónimo, *Equestrian Portrait of Viceroy Bernardo Gálvez*, ca. 1785–96. Oil on canvas, 87 ½ × 86 in. (222 x 218 cm). Museo Nacional de Historia, Mexico City.

far the largest viceregal portrait, and it is the only equestrian portrait of a viceroy from New Spain. While the painting is signed twice, nothing is known of its artists: one Padre San Gerónimo, who claimed responsibility for the graphic idiom ("lo Razgueó"), and another Fray Pablo de Jesús, whose signature suggests he was tasked with actually painting the picture ("Pto"). Moreover, no information about the picture's production, possible commission, or subsequent provenance has come to light. The canvas is dated 1796, but this is rather odd, temporally anchoring the picture to ten years after the sitter's death. And, more to the point, it is composed in an obviously bizarre linear mode that has neither precedent nor follower. Perhaps for all of these reasons, the equestrian portrait of Gálvez has largely evaded serious scrutiny. While it has been frequently included in surveys and catalogs of colonial art, it has typically figured as mere curiosity.[1]

The picture's relationship to calligraphy is about the only thing that *is* clear. Its looping line recalls the exercises of early modern penmen, who mobilized the graphic idiom of letter formation to produce figurative representation, a virtuosic use of the writing implement celebrated through reproduction in print (fig. 2). Padre Gerónimo's signature also makes that connection. Though no

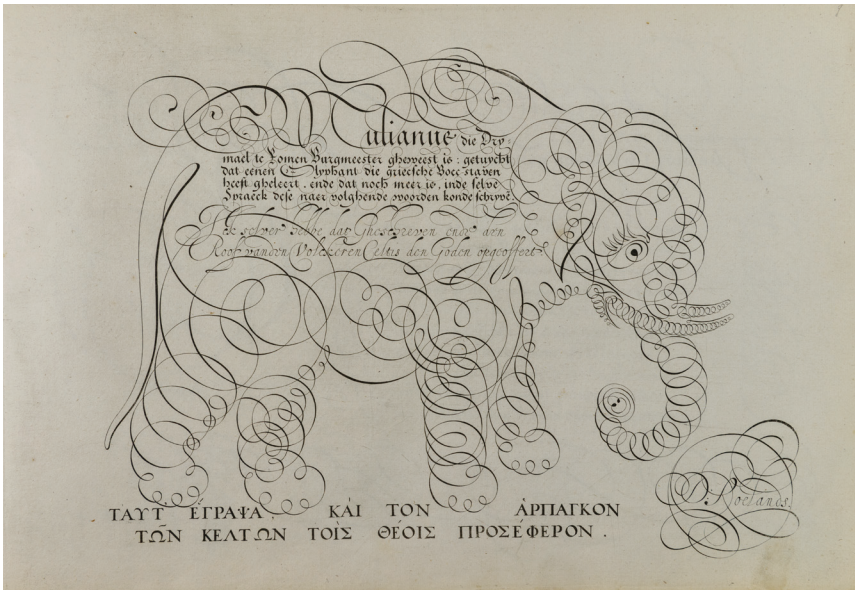

Fig. 2
Simon Wynhoutsz Frisius, after David Roelands, *Elephant*, 1616. Etching, 9 ½ × 14 ¾ in. (24.5 × 37.5 cm). Newberry Library, Chicago, Wing folio ZW 646 .R622.

longer common, the verb *rasguear* was related to the frequently deployed noun *rasgo*, defined in the first Spanish dictionary as "the handling of the quill that scribes use to demonstrate their gallantry or ambition."[2] The Gálvez equestrian portrait was designed through precisely these sorts of gallant twists of the paintbrush-cum-quill, and this signature insists its artists and viewers understood it in these terms.

Despite this fact and the routine gestures to this painting's reliance on calligraphic idioms, commentators have not actually taken seriously the history of writing from which such images emerged or seen that this history might tell us something important about the portrait. In the only sustained scholarly treatment of this puzzling painting, Ray Hernández-Durán argues for its production as a subversive response to the public unveiling, in 1796 (the year to which it is dated), of a to-scale model for a monumental equestrian portrait of the Spanish King Charles IV.[3] He thus positions the painted portrait of Gálvez as a sign of increasing antagonism of creole citizens (that is, people of Spanish bloodlines born in the Americas) toward the crown on the Iberian Peninsula. The reasoning seems sound enough: the public planning for a statue of the king was a grand affair and happened at a moment in which tensions between creoles (who Gálvez, a creole himself, might be seen to represent) and the crown were notoriously on the rise, ultimately producing a swell of discontent that led to revolution and Mexican independence.[4]

In this essay, I offer a printed model for this painting that has never before been considered. But the questions thus brought into view extend far beyond source hunting. For attaching a particular printed prototype to this painting links the picture to ambits in which the history of calligraphy was being actively rethought, in both Spain and New Spain. Doing so, in turn, allows a reappraisal

of the work's original function, its intended meaning, and its position within the intellectual and civic history of Mexico City, in ways never before deemed possible. I thus use this case to suggest, more broadly, the centrality of the culture of writing in the Spanish Empire and, in turn, its potential as a realm of scholarly inquiry.

A Source and Its Renown

Various calligraphic portraits have been proposed as inspirations for the Gálvez painting.[5] All share the basic language of calligraphy and its redeployment for equestrian portraiture, and it is certainly possible that artists in New Spain knew of them. But I will here suggest a more definitive origin, not before considered, one that was positioned to be *specifically* taken up in viceregal New Spain: a printed calligraphic equestrian portrait of King Phillip IV produced in 1631 for Pedro Diaz Morante's four-part treatise on handwriting (fig. 3).[6] In Morante's engraving, Phillip IV and the horse upon which he sits appear more frontal—nearly charging out of the picture—but rely on the same type of graphic line, one that spins into coils through the legs and tail to give the creature spring and bounce. The king's face, like that of Gálvez, is minutely rendered, in a radical departure of description from the rest of the composition.

This engraved showpiece of calligraphy featuring the king on horseback was produced far earlier—by nearly a century—than any of the models that have previously been suggested as inspiration for the artists who would fashion Gálvez's near life-size picture in paint. It might thus seem an improbable source. Yet those who were invested in writing across the Spanish Empire at the end of the eighteenth century were actively looking back, reframing earlier histories of writing so as to harness the potential of script for an imagined ideal future. In the process, Morante became a figure of considerable focus, and notably so in the 1770s.

At this time in Spain, the nobleman, archivist, and bibliographer Francisco Xavier de Santiago Palomares set himself the project of helping to rectify what he saw as a decrepit contemporary culture of handwriting. Lost was the grace and ease of writing indexed by the mountains of older documents that surrounded him, ones generated by long-standing practices of Spanish bureaucracy. To recover these qualities, he began tracing the history of handwriting, particularly its instruction through treatises, and in the process alighted on the figure of Morante, whose *Arte nueva de escribir* became a touch point. The engraving of Phillip IV that appeared in this treatise thus took on new life.

Having convinced his contemporaries of the utility of earlier ideals, Palomares earned appointment in 1774 to the Royal Basque Society of Friends of the Nation (Real Sociedad Bascongada de Amigos del País) and was charged with preparing a publication. The result was his own *Arte nueva de escribir* of 1776, which traced both the development of handwriting methods and their explication in Spanish treatises, situating these within broader European practices and publications.[7] Palomares calls out all the great names of Spanish calligraphy—from Juan de

Fig. 3
Pedro Díaz Morante, *Equestrian Portrait of Phillip IV*, 1631. Engraving and etching, 13 ½ × 9 in. (34 × 23 cm). Newberry Library, Chicago, Wing folio ZW 640 .M792.

Yciar to Pedro Madariaga to Joseph de Casanova, among others—but goes on to lament that the "*letra Bastarda*, which had been magisterial until well into the [eighteenth] century . . . had come to be entirely wasted" and that this accompanied the "total abandonment of the rules of Art."[8] He laid blame squarely at the feet of Juan Claudio Polanco (though he named others as well), who championed the *pseudo-redondilla* script and produced an artificial and overly mathematical stiffness in contemporary writing, "notably disfiguring the Spanish *bastarda* and throwing the art of writing into confusion."[9]

The corrective was a return to Morante's earlier text. As Palomares explains, this master's grand innovation had come from grasping the potential of the letter *L* to instill facility in the hand and to do so in record time. The power of the *L* was twofold: first, it flows easily from and into neighboring letters, and, second, an *L*'s proper formation requires moving between the three main writing surfaces of the quill—the tip, the hollow opening, and the sliced edge. Morante forged a system of instructing practitioners to work sequentially through the

Fig. 4
Pedro Díaz Morante, *Calligraphic Exercise*, 1619. Engraving and etching, 9 × 13 ½ in. (23 x 34 cm). Newberry Library, Chicago, Wing folio ZW 640 .M792.

letters of the alphabet while inserting the *L*, often multiple times, between each (fig. 4); doing so instilled at once the nimble handling of the quill and the graceful linkage of letters and strokes. The printed models Palomares included in his volume drew directly on this method and closely reflected those included in Morante's earlier text.

At stake in returning to this system, in the view of Palomares, was nothing less than "the UNIFORMITY of a distinctive national character just as other nations have and that we [Spaniards] ourselves had before certain modern professors propagated bad taste."[10] Good taste and the nation, even empire—these twinned obsessions of the eighteenth century would come via quillwork—but this would be less a progression toward an Enlightenment ideal on the horizon than a return to a method of writing and its instruction that was seen as "the only way to give the art of writing its former splendor."[11] So central was Morante to this supposed potential to rescue the national character that Palomares's subtitle describes the art of good writing he was aiming to foster as "invented by the distinguished master Pedro Diaz Morante," and his book's pages included reproductions of many of the earlier master's demonstrations.

Palomares does not comment directly on any of Morante's figurative sheets of loops and flourishes, which range from depictions of mythic sea monsters to multifigure Christian allegories. But these were the heart of Morante's treatise and by far its most robust component. Within the corpus, an equestrian portrait of the king held obvious pride of place and acted as something of an advertisement of royal imprimatur for the entire project. For this reason alone it would have captured attention, particularly that of Palomares, who was himself appointed by a Spanish king, Charles III, to oversee the organization

of documents at the Royal Library at the Escorial Palace and the Archivo de la Secretaría del Estado.

Yet Morante's portrait of Phillip IV played a still larger role in thinking about the cultural production of Spain's so-called Golden Age. None other than Francisco de Quevedo—nobleman, courtier, and one of the most famed poets of the seventeenth century—dedicated an entire sonnet to the subject: "The portrait of the King / *Nuestro Señor* / made from strokes and knots (*rasgos y lazos*), with a quill / by Pedro Morante."[12] Indeed *lazos*—ties, knots, bows, or loops that bind—become the structuring element for the sonnet itself, which describes Phillip as made up from these forms by Morante's hand, much as the nation is made through the bonds and ties it has with its monarch. The poem similarly knots in on itself through the swirling repetition of the words *rasgo* and *lazo*, which chiastically suture or bind the lines of the text.[13] This is all in service of equal praise for Morante himself, whose quill is compared to the brushes of Apelles and Timanthes; and in other sonnets Quevedo would compare him not to antique heroes of the arts but to Spain's famed court painters.[14] Thus for anyone looking back from Palomares's resuscitation of Morante, there was much to celebrate and plenty of period praise, specifically about the portrait of Phillip, with which to do so.

A Model for New Spain

The elite citizens of New Spain generally kept abreast of major intellectual developments in Europe, but they were especially well positioned to appreciate Palomares's remobilization of Morante. In 1785, Gálvez oversaw the official opening of classes at Mexico City's Academy of San Carlos, New Spain's long-awaited artistic academy that had been founded a few years earlier. Gálvez served as viceroy from June 1785 until his death at the end of the following year. His tenure was brief, but during it he would come to personally know Jerónimo Antonio Gil, a recently arrived Spaniard who served as the academy's first director. And Gil, I argue, was a critical figure in the production of this equestrian portrait.

Gil specialized in the art of engraving, particularly for the production of coins and medals. While he was in Madrid, however, the lack of vacant, court-appointed positions in these fields meant that Gil pursued the art of letterforms and set about designing a new typeface—another technology that depended on engraving and metalwork—as a means of winning royal favor.[15] In the process, he came to know Palomares, not only drawing on his intellectual precepts but also befriending the esteemed calligrapher and archivist and calling on him for advice at once technical and social. The two traded letters about the history of calligraphy and typefaces, sent proof sheets back and forth, and lamented that the fluidly written word was an ever-rarer accomplishment.[16]

Gil took Palomares across the Atlantic with him to New Spain. Or, at least, he had his copy of Palomares's *Arte nueva de escribir* alongside, which one finds in an inventory of his books.[17] For a man with a substantial library who was obviously invested in the history of handwriting, Gil kept relatively few books on

Fig. 5
Jerónimo Antonio Gil, *Designs for Medals of the Academy of San Carlos*, 1785. Pen and wash, 8½ × 16¼ in. (21.7 × 16 cm). Archivo General de Indias, Seville.

the subject. Yet among these was a treatise listed simply as an *Arte de escribir* and another listed as an *Arte de escribir* by Polanco.[18] There is no doubt that the first of these is Morante's, for these three texts formed a nexus: Palomares's own treatise, the text by Polanco that he was writing against and that spurred him on in his efforts to rectify the contemporary state of affairs, and finally the magnum opus by Morante that Palomares used as his exemplar with which to do so. It should be noted that these texts, installed in Gil's library, were available to a readership broader than just academicians. For Gil's living quarters in the mint building also served as a space for him to conduct classes and were a de rigueur stop for elite visitors touring Mexico City.[19]

Of course, simply placing Morante's treatise in New Spain does not itself explain the appearance of a monumental equestrian portrait that mobilized his example. But the year 1785, in which Gálvez assumed the position of viceroy, was pivotal for the court's thinking about the potential of both portraiture and calligraphy. The Academy of San Carlos's first official project took place in this year: the design of a set of commemorative medals to be given as yearly prizes to pupils. Gil, with his background in medal engraving, took the lead, working in direct consultation with Gálvez, who would ultimately submit the designs to authorities in Spain for final approval.[20]

Fig. 6
Nicolas Ponce and Jean Duplessi-Bertaux, *Prise de Pensacola*, 1784. Engraving and etching, 7 × 8 in. (18.1 × 20.1 cm) (platemark). British Museum, London.

Gil produced a sheet with ink and wash drawings of three different medals (fig. 5). The obverse would be standard across all three—a stately portrait of King Charles III in august profile with a laudatory border inscription—while each reverse would show a significant recent event in the New Spanish viceroyalty. Two of these were institutional: the royal decree granting approval to the Mining Tribunal and the foundation of the Academy of San Carlos itself. The third, which appears at the top of the sheet, featured an event both more recent and different in tone. It commemorated Gálvez's military victory over the English in Pensacola (Florida), a decisive event that reconsolidated Spanish power in what is now the southern United States.[21] Though unacknowledged to date, the design closely follows a print produced the previous year by the Parisian printmaker Nicolas Ponce (fig. 6). In both, the vista cascades, via a line of troops marching into the scene, to a distant military garrison that has just exploded from a well-placed shot by the Spanish forces.[22] But each composition's organizing principle is the figure of Gálvez himself, who appears in the foreground calmly seated on a rearing horse, his eyes on the horizon and his baton of command outstretched toward his troops.

The idea of an equestrian portrait was thus clearly front of mind in 1785—the product of Gil's conception of how New Spain's Academy would celebrate its students and its filiation with the authorities. But the fate of Gil's design for the medal featuring Gálvez on horseback should give us pause. For once sent to Spain, the proposal was summarily rejected, and Gil was instructed to fashion

medals that would celebrate *only* the king, on both obverse and reverse. As Kelly Donahue-Wallace has suggested, Gil and Gálvez may have aimed the medals at shoring up creole support for the crown by pairing the monarch's image on one side with a matter of local concern and pride on the other; but for the officials in Spain, a group that included none other than the viceroy's own uncle José de Gálvez, these aims were misaligned with programmatic concerns about curbing the rising power of the creole oligarchy in Mexico City and in New Spain more broadly.[23]

There should have been nothing inherently subversive about the portrait medals' pairings. In fact, quite the contrary. The Gálvez portrait medal was meant to celebrate imperial might. The scene of recapturing Pensacola, and with it swaths of territory in present-day Florida, was to be accompanied by an inscription: "The hubris and pridefulness of the English, shot down by Spain."[24] Even pictorially, the medal's reverse positioned Gálvez as a literal flipside of the king, executing the vision of an all-knowing monarch—shown in the ennobled bust-length format of the empire's coinage—within the territorial removes that he, nevertheless, controlled. And yet, the equestrian portrait of a viceroy would not do.

So by what rules of decorum would it have been appropriate to have a nearly life-size equestrian portrait of Gálvez—the first and *only* example in New Spain—painted but a few years later?[25] In short, it was not; for, in fact, this picture was not intended as a portrait of the viceroy at all. During a 2020 reinventory and basic material analysis of the colonial holdings of the Museo Nacional de Historia in Mexico City, Nora Pérez, Elia Botello, and Armando Arciniega made a startling discovery. Taking an in-gallery X-ray, they noticed an inscription below Gálvez's name: "D[on] Carlos IIII. Rey de España, O[MNIA] D[EI] G[RATIA] (by all the grace of God)."[26] This, then, was originally simply a portrait of the king—one that, at some point, had Gálvez's name appended to transform the identity of the sitter entirely.

Genealogies on Display

To this point, we have seen how the rhetoric of handwriting would have made the equestrian portrait a show of support to the Spanish Crown, had it initially been intended to depict Gálvez. Of course, a calligraphic demonstration of loyalty to the empire also makes good sense for a portrait of the king himself. Via this writerly rhetoric, the picture participated in a transatlantic endeavor to forge a distinctive national character through projects of good taste initiated by the Academy of San Carlos and, specifically, by Gil, its new director. But resurfacing the sitter's identification alongside that rhetoric goes a long way toward reimagining the picture's original context and so, too, its subsequent alterations.

After all, it was not every day that such a large-scale portrait of the Spanish king was—or, perhaps more to the point, needed to be—produced in New Spain.[27] Indeed, there were very few occasions to create such a grand portrait of a monarch and few purposes for which such a thing would be suitable. One event, however, demanded many portraits of the king and was exactly the sort

of occasion that would have benefited from this picture, its size, and its pictorial language. This would be the so-called *jura*, by which the citizens of New Spain formally accepted a newly crowned king—albeit one who would not actually cross the Atlantic from Madrid—through a multiday civic festival.

The *jura*, or swearing of allegiance, to King Charles IV of Spain took place in Mexico City, December 27–29, 1789. It was a lavish affair and one in which the king's portrait played a prominent role as his proxy, making the monarch present despite his physical remove. During such ceremonies, the bust-length portrait tended to play the most important role, with many examples installed as part of the various ephemeral stage sets that adorned the city.[28] But on this occasion, the equestrian portrait was mobilized and situated in multiple prominent locations in Mexico City's main square.[29] As reported in a chronicle of these years, one example was placed before the parish church connected directly to the city's cathedral: "In front of *El Sagrario* was placed a pyramid with the king on horseback, and it was very good."[30] Yet two more images of Spanish kings on horseback (neither now extant) were also put on display in the Plaza Mayor, something so grand as to be reported in the city's official periodical, the *Gaceta de México*. It noted the erection of "two equestrian statues of bronze on marble pedestals, life-size, one of King Charles III placed at the corner of the cemetery of the cathedral . . . the other of King Charles IV at the other corner of the cemetery facing the palace."[31]

There are several reasons to think that the calligraphic equestrian portrait of Charles IV also formed part of this civic decoration. First, there is the picture's scale. By the standards of colonial portraiture of the period, it is oversized; but a nearly seven-foot-tall painting would be a good fit for the grandeur of such events, which required objects scaled to a capital city clothed, on these occasions, in the trappings of regal authority. Second, there are technical reasons to imagine it functioning in precisely this capacity. A seam near the canvas's edge runs around the entire, nearly square picture, a conspicuous interruption that suggests a rather dramatic material alteration at some point in the object's trajectory. The handling of paint similarly indexes a shift in the picture's conception. The gray-toned passages that form the rocky outcrop transgress the figure's sharp outline: hooves are made clumsy through a thick addition of paint up and over their contours (figs. 7 and 8); and the lines of the tail were narrowed and weakened with overpaint that flowed a bit too far, rendering flourishes that should have been sumptuous and robust instead of attenuated and spindly (fig. 9).

These were awkward additions. Had the inclusion of a landscape been originally intended, the execution would have been accomplished far more easily and far more gracefully before the white calligraphic line was applied. And in several of the picture's other passages—around the representational elements of face, neck attire, and saddle adornment—this was exactly how paint was handled (fig. 10). Or, alternatively, line and ornament were seamlessly coordinated (fig. 11). In short, the landscape is a later addition. Without this setting, the original painting was a filigree of white line on a black background. That hardly makes for an easel picture to hang on the wall, but it would have been entirely

Fig. 7 (left)
Fray Pablo de Jesús and Padre San Gerónimo, *Equestrian Portrait of Viceroy Bernardo Gálvez*, detail, ca. 1785–96. Oil on canvas. Museo Nacional de Historia, Mexico City.

Fig. 8 (center)
Fray Pablo de Jesús and Padre San Gerónimo, *Equestrian Portrait of Viceroy Bernardo Gálvez*, detail, ca. 1785–96. Oil on canvas. Museo Nacional de Historia, Mexico City.

Fig. 9 (right)
Fray Pablo de Jesús and Padre San Gerónimo, *Equestrian Portrait of Viceroy Bernardo Gálvez*, detail, ca. 1785–96. Oil on canvas. Museo Nacional de Historia, Mexico City.

suitable for an event that set all manner of pictures and allegorical emblems within or upon architectural frameworks. As Elia Botello further noted during the recent examinations of the painting, the edge of the canvas is particularly frayed and unfinished, leading her to believe that it was not originally displayed in a traditional frame.[32] One could easily imagine it, however, tacked to a wooden support for one of the city's ephemeral stage sets on the occasion of a *jura*.

The printed sources used in producing the picture further situate its function within this civic assemblage. While the calligraphic conceit was based on Morante's engraving, the portrait of the king himself was quite exactingly modeled on another print, one featuring the then-youthful Charles mounted on horseback in the same pose and attire (fig. 12).[33] Much as for the Morante engraving, the selection of this second equestrian portrait, produced in 1781 when Charles was but a young prince, might strike as befuddlingly *retardataire*. That is, until one considers the engraving's purpose, which was to reproduce and thereby memorialize a marble statue of the young nobleman that had been sculpted, so the print itself tells us, by Celedonio Nicolás Arce y Cacho, member of the crown-backed artistic Academy of San Fernando in Madrid. In mobilizing this second model, then, the equestrian calligraphic portrait of Charles IV painted in Mexico City could still call to mind a sculpture, at least for those who knew the source. Despite its dematerialization of that printed-sculpted model through the language of calligraphy, the painting was thus nevertheless suited to an occasion that rather unusually included multiple three-dimensional equestrian effigies of the new king. The toggle between the three-dimensional referent and the linear mode of execution actually emphasizes the calligraphic transformation central to the picture's conception.

Finally, in blending Arce y Cacho's equestrian portrait of Charles IV with Morante's of Phillip IV, the picture forged a connection between kings. This was apt for a *jura*, an event that necessarily stressed genealogy. After all, the

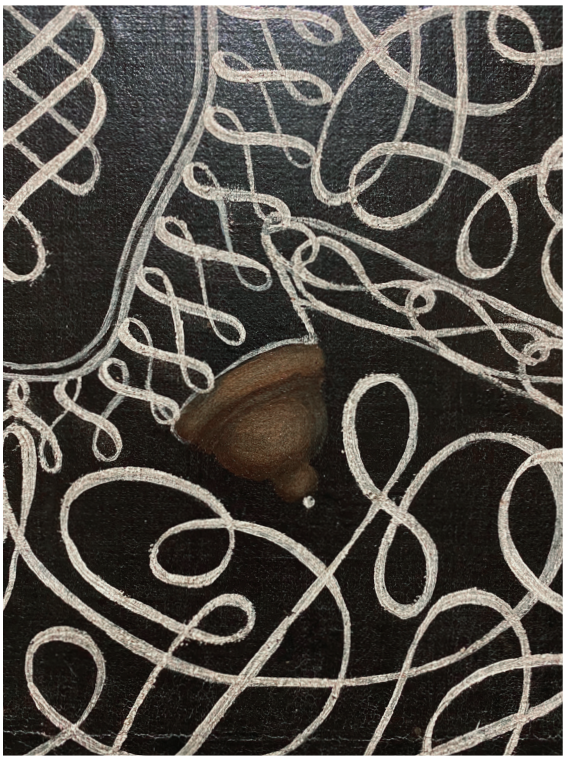

Fig. 10 (left)
Fray Pablo de Jesús and Padre San Gerónimo, *Equestrian Portrait of Viceroy Bernardo Gálvez*, detail, ca. 1785–96. Oil on canvas. Museo Nacional de Historia, Mexico City.

Fig. 11 (right)
Fray Pablo de Jesús and Padre San Gerónimo, *Equestrian Portrait of Viceroy Bernardo Gálvez*, detail, ca. 1785–96. Oil on canvas. Museo Nacional de Historia, Mexico City.

king became the monarch through dynastic succession—something the Bourbons of the eighteenth century knew all too well after the fraught lack of an heir at the end of the preceding century and their own assumption of the throne through the protracted War of the Spanish Succession. Thus one of the main monuments designed for the *jura* to Charles IV centered on his imperial predecessors. In front of the *ayuntamiento*, or town hall, a neoclassical facade was erected, and between each pairing of Corinthian columns was placed one of the ten Spanish kings that led to Charles IV's reign.[34] As if the question of lineage had not been settled, the very center of the design displayed effigies of Hernán Cortés and the current viceroy, the Count of Revillagigedo, staring in homage at Charles's literal family tree—genealogy doubled via didactic diagram.

A mobilization in paint of the visual language of calligraphy—and, more specifically, of the model laid out by Morante in his portrait of Phillip IV—was carefully calibrated for communicating the city's allegiance to the crown and to the continuity of the imperial project. Morante had been explicitly redeployed by Palomares with the goal of reimposing an earlier model of writing and education aimed at producing a national character.[35] Readers took note. Palomares's own text spawned encomiastic re-edition, and it was precisely the debt to the nation that was commented upon. In a 1789 treatise following Palomares's design, Estévan Ximenez explained that the benefit of Palomares, and thus implicitly of Morante as well, was that "disciples learn to write—with solid

Fig. 12
Juan Antonio Salvador Carmona, after Celedonio Nicolás Arce y Cacho, *Equestrian Charles of Bourbon, Prince of Asturias*, 1781. Engraving with etching, 17 × 12 ¼ in. (43 × 31 cm). Museo de Historia, Madrid.

fundamentals and with less time than following other manuals—our national letter *bastarda* with clarity, liberty, and poise."[36] The equestrian portrait thus emblematized both the "spirit and good taste of the nation" and the process by which citizens could embody it. This would be accomplished, so the picture reminds us, through the resuscitation of the historically vaunted qualities represented by the properly trained calligraphic hand.

The Lives and Afterlives of the King

If, indeed, the portrait of Charles IV was made for the 1789 *jura*, its survival is remarkable. By their very nature, objects produced for such events were ephemeral, and we are left with little evidence beyond initial designs and contemporary descriptions. Whatever the case, and however the picture was displayed in the intervening years, 1796 presented a new opportunity. The erection, in the Plaza Mayor, of a giant plaster and wood model of an equestrian portrait of the king by Manuel Tolsá—one later cast in bronze and finally unveiled in

1803—caused quite a stir. The city celebrated with speeches, music, masses, and all manner of spectacle, from the ringing of bells to grand illumination with candles, for multiple days.[37] This seems to have offered the opportunity to take the portrait off the proverbial shelf.

The painted date aligns the picture with this second instance of public equestrian portrait installation in Mexico City.[38] To be clear, however: this was not the impetus to make the painting, but rather to *remake* it, with the addition of the landscape that awkwardly deformed much of the linework but gave the portrait a setting. And at that point a date was added above the signature of Fray Pablo de Jesús, but in a notably strange format: "This was completed 25 October [17]96" (*Se Acabó dia 25, de Octu.e ã 96.*). Not made, not painted (a verb already assigned to the artist), but completed or finished—we might say updated from that which had already been. The *jura* offered a multimedia context to accommodate a purely calligraphic portrait of white lines set against a black background. In contrast, the events of 1796, while dedicated to an equestrian image of the king and prompting multiple forms of tribute, lacked an overarching program or infrastructure. The painting would need to stand on its own, and the landscape made that possible.

But of course the story did not end there. For at some point the portrait was renamed, its sitter remade through the overpainted addition of a sobriquet that covers the original inscription. The fact that a portrait of the Spanish king would not have been desired in postindependence Mexico makes a good deal of sense. Why, however, it would have been decided to retroactively assign the portrait to Viceroy Gálvez is less obvious. But it was a fitting choice. As we have seen, the topic of script and calligraphy was actively discussed during his reign, and particularly at the Academy of San Carlos, whose official opening in 1785 he personally oversaw. This was a matter of interest not just for the academy's director, Gil, with his endeavor in typeface design—a project he did not finish before departing for New Spain—but so, too, quite apparently for Gálvez himself.

For also in 1785, Gálvez had a sumptuous treatise on writing and calligraphy dedicated to him by its author and master penman, Rafael Ximeno.[39] Perhaps because Ximeno's manuscript never made it to print, its relationship to the viceroy has gone completely unexplored in the literature.[40] The text features a range of calligraphic showpieces, including an elaborately framed self-portrait of the author (fig. 13). Ximeno addresses the reader with a jaunty pose, quill lifted as if just finishing the title page of a copy of a book bearing the treatise's name. That *mise en abyme*—the treatise doubled, sitting in a frame within itself—is echoed by the very nature of the calligraphic page, its looping and nesting lines doubling over and twisting in upon themselves. Though we may never know who exactly decided to relabel the equestrian portrait, this context makes its assignment back to Gálvez—of all possible figures—more than a simple way to keep an intriguing painting whose regal subject was now unwelcome in an independent nation. It was instead a quite knowing act.

Yet it is important to note that the picture offered itself up for such a shift. The ghostly grayscale landscape lends a somber, elegiac tone to what otherwise

Fig. 13
Rafael Ximeno, *Self-Portrait with Ornament*, 1785. Ink on paper. Appears as facsimile in Pablo Martínez del Río, *Un arte de escribir del siglo XVIII: Apuntes para la historia del rasgueado en México* (Mexico City: Instituto de Historia; Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, 1955).

would have been a buoyant and abstracted image. This was suitable enough for a portrait that now needed to stand as a posthumous monument to and a prompt of remembrance for a ruler a decade since deceased. Riding through a nocturnal landscape, Gálvez now stares back at us from beyond the grave. That pictorial play of light and dark is amplified by the way Gálvez had been celebrated at the end of his life. A long, lamenting poem, *El sol triunfante*, was written on the occasion by the brothers Bruno Francisco and José Rafael Larrañaga. They rather predictably conceived of and allegorized the former viceroy as the figure of the sun itself, playing with the trope of the ruler shining his light on his beloved subjects in all manner of ways over the course of the manuscript poem's more than 140 pages. The theme is enacted, too, at the level of an almost obsessive wordplay: "Only (*solo*) a gallant sun (*Sol*) suffices for a singular (*solo*) hero / only (*solo*) suffices a Gálvez and without a comparison / and suffices

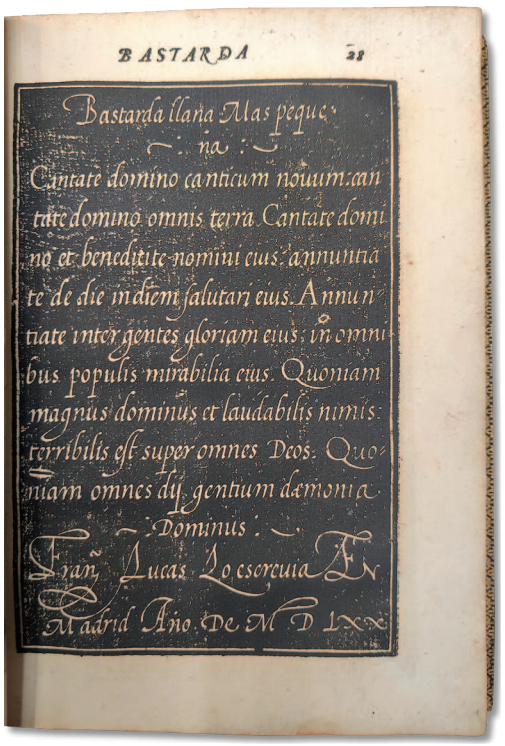

Fig. 14
Francisco Lucas, *Bastarda llana*, page 27 in *Arte de escribir* (Madrid: Juan de la Cuesta, 1609), 4°; 8 in. (20 cm). Woodcut. Newberry Library, Chicago, Wing ZW 540. L96. Photo courtesy Suzanne Karr Schmidt.

an Andalucian ONLY (*solo*) BERNARDO."[41] In turn, Gálvez's death is metaphorized as the setting of the sun, his life a great transit that leaves the world ensconced in sadness: "You are the honor of the Kingdom of the Indies / constituted by the Spanish Jove / You are our comfort, sweet pleasantry . . . propitious sun / But now without your light the celestial bodies are extinguished and the world remains in total darkness."[42] This melancholic, melodramatic description could hardly resonate more with the equestrian portrait—riding through the black air, across a barren crag of earth on his phantom steed, dematerialized through loops of pure line.

The recasting of the picture to posthumously honor the viceroy—perforce not the intent in 1788 or 1796—was made possible only by the rather surprising color palette it had to begin with. As well suited as its dramatic black ground with white linework was to a funerary context, it would have been even more suitable for the calligraphic design and its particular message at the earlier moment. Indeed, this color scheme also communicated a return to an era of handwriting far in the past, even earlier than that of Morante. Morante's was actually one of the first Spanish treatises to be produced with engraved and etched copper plates, which resulted in an entire volume of black lines on plain white paper ground. Prior to this, woodcut allowed printing both black-on-white *and* white-on-black, where the entire block was printed with the resulting white lines left in reserve (fig. 14). Among Morante's predecessors, Palomares specifically singles out and praises Juan de Yciar, Pedro Madariaga, and Francisco Lucas—all of whom produced white-on-black sheets for their treatises.

Thus not only was an equestrian portrait using Morante's model fitting for a painting celebrating writing's potential for the monarchy but so, too, was the visual idiom of white-on-black, which cast back to the treatises of titans of a bygone era. Ironically, this coloristic format also made the picture usable, repurposeable as an elegiac funerary monument that retrospectively effected an erasure of regal identity. In its final form, then, the portrait poignantly communicates not allegiance to the crown but the death of a viceroy who rides into the sunset. Even so, the valences of Morante and of Gil and of Palomares were still there for those who knew to look for them. The king had long been deceased, the monarchy and empire had been deposed, and Gálvez was long gone, but this curious picture could be retained through a clever swap of identity. Those who wished could coordinate these figures' achievements and the picture of the viceroy not with the pages and pages of a national-imperialist discourse about the fluidity of the pen and the qualities it might inculcate in men of good letters in an empire but rather with his personal project of edification and the loss of a local figure as the sun set, too, on empire itself.

Writing's History

Handwriting occupies an awkward position within the history of art as a discipline. From early in the training of an art historian, a great range of vocabulary is acquired to describe the visual phenomena of pictures and things—particularly the dynamics of two-dimensional pictures and the volumetric or haptic qualities of sculpture, architecture, and more quotidian forms of visual culture. Handwriting, script, and calligraphy generally fall outside of this training, even as fields such as design and epigraphy have developed a no less precise and certainly no less technical language for assessing written forms. In certain subfields whose traditions are marked by a close proximity between writing and the visual arts, specialists might ultimately gain greater facility and learn to chart the evolution of script forms alongside artistic styles; one thinks, for instance, of East Asian and Islamic art histories. But for western Europe and its imperial holdings, a dividing line has proved intractable.

This is not to say that art historians of these early modern traditions have paid no attention to the formal properties of the written word. However, when the art-historical gaze has fallen on writing manuals and their history, they have generally been treated as a genre disconnected from the broader world of visual thinking.[43] That Latin Americanists specifically have not been drawn to the intersections between the visuality of the word and the visuality of the image is surprising; after all, the written word was a colonial imposition in lands with analphabetic or pictographic inscriptional traditions. Yet the field has focused most of its energy on that dynamic in semiotic terms—explaining how analphabetism reconfigured alphabetic script's authority and performance or examining the interplay of signification between European word, Mesoamerican glyph, and images from both traditions.[44]

The Charles IV/Gálvez equestrian portrait forces the issue. It is an oil painting, to be sure, and one that relies on that technology's illusionism; but so, too,

does it depend on the language of quillwork, with its fanciful flourishes. As this essay has explored, what may seem mere repetitious loops, if admittedly built into a figural conceit at grandiose scale, have a history. And the picture's ability to make meaning for its audiences at several different historical moments was dependent upon precisely those viewers' knowledge of that history. This portrait thus acts as something of a limit case for art history's relationship to the techniques and trajectories of writing in the early modern period. With little sense of its provenance, original commission, and artists, we are all too easily left with a painting that—in the absence of an understanding of its relationship to writing's forms and facture—remains unforthcoming, a mute object. Remains so, that is, unless we recognize its referent source and, more importantly, the *longue durée* of thinking about a Spanish hand that this referent was meant to prompt. The picture thus also suggests that the acres and acres of paintings produced in the Spanish Empire that feature text so prominently on their surfaces might too yield richer histories if we, as art historians, learn to look at the *rasgos y lazos*, to quote Quevedo, with which they were so carefully coded. ■

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1 See, for instance, Manuel Toussaint, "Colonial Art/Arte Colonial," in *Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art = Veinte siglos de arte mexicano*, exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1940), 93, no. 59; François Cali, *L'art des conquistadors* (Paris: Arthaud, 1960), 281; Manuel Toussaint, *Pintura Colonial en México* (Mexico City: Imprenta Universitaria, 1965); Tomás Pérez Vejo and Mara Yolanda Quezada, *De novohispanos a mexicanos: Retratos e identidad colectiva en una sociedad en transición* (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2009), 31. The exception to this is Ray Hernández-Durán, "The Language of Line in Late Eighteenth-Century New Spain: The Calligraphic Portrait of Bernardo de Gálvez (1796)," in *Buen Gusto and Classicism in the Visual Cultures of Latin America, 1780–1910*, ed. Paul B. Niell and Stacie G. Widdifield (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2013), 179–205.
2 "un trato de pluma, de q usan los escriuanos por galãteria, o por codicia"; Sebastián de Covarrubias, *Tesoro de la lengua castellana o española* (Madrid: Luis Sanchez, 1611), 603r. All translations are my own.

3 On the statue and its installation, see Clara Bargellini, "La lealtad americana: El significado de la estatua ecuestre de Carlos IV," in *Iconología y sociedad: Arte colonial hispanoamericano* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1987), 209–19.
4 As Hernández-Durán states, "It was in this sociopolitical environment that the Gálvez portrait was commissioned, created, and viewed; consequently, I ask whether this work could be regarded as a visual articulation corresponding to the broader sociopolitical climate in the Americas as the effects of the Bourbon Reforms, along with Peninsular critiques of Creole society, increasingly elicited defensive reactions from segments of the Novohispanic population." Relying on the work of Jaime Cuadriello, he describes this as part of an "encoded political discourse . . . tied to an emergent Creole identity and distinctly American intellectual traditions and cultural accomplishments." Hernández-Durán, "Language of Line," 199–200.
5 See ibid., 184–88. To the models suggested there, we could add a ca. 1766 portrait of Charles III in Luis de Olod's *Tratado del origen y arte de escribir bien*; on this print, see *Caligrafía española: El arte de escribir*, exh cat. (Madrid: Biblioteca Nacional de España, 2015), 150, no. 32.
6 Each of the four parts of Díaz Morante's *Art nueva de escribir* was published by a different Madrid-based publisher; for a brief overview, see "Pedro Díaz Morante," https://dbe.rah.es/biografias/13234/pedro-diaz-morante, accessed January 18, 2022; and Manuel Rico y Sinobas, *Diccionario de calígrafos españoles* (Madrid: Real Academia Española, 1903), 56–58.
7 Francisco Xavier de Santiago Palomares, *Arte nueva de escribir, inventada por el insigne maestro Pedro Diaz Morante* (Madrid: Antonio de Sancha, 1776).
8 "la letra Bastarda, que fue Magistral en las escuelas del Reyno hasta bien entrado el siglo en que vivimos . . . llegó a perderse enteramente . . . total abandóno de las reglas del Arte"; ibid., 5.
9 "desfiguró notablemente la bastarda Española, y puso en confusion el arte de escribir"; ibid., 6. Polanco's text was published as Juan Claudio Aznar de Polanco, *Arte nuevo de escribir, por preceptos geometricos y reglas mathematicas* (Madrid: Heredores de M. Ruiz de Murga, 1719).
10 "la UNIFORMIDAD de un Caracter nacional distintivo, como le tienen las demás Naciones y teniamos nosotros antes que algunos Profesores modernos propagasen el mal gusto"; Palomares, *Arte nueva de escribir*, 2.
11 "poner el arte de escribir en su antiguo esplendor"; ibid., 38.
12 "Al retrato del rey / Nuestro Señor / hecho de rasgos y lazos, con pluma, / por Pedro Morante"; Francisco de Quevedo, *Obra poética*, ed. José Manuel Blecua, 3 vols. (Madrid: Castalia, 1969–1971), 2:423, no. 220.
13 This reading is offered, and the sonnet more broadly discussed, in Beatrice Garzelli, "'Bien con argucia rara y generosa': Pedro Morante visto da Quevedo," *Rivista di filologia e letterature ispaniche* (1998): 143–56. On the poem's complex edition history, see Rodrigo Cacho Casal, "Quevedo y la filología de autor: Edición de la silva *El pincel*," *Criticón* 114 (2012): 179–212.
14 On Quevedo's *silva* and its relation to art and art theory, see Manuel Ángel Candelas Colodrón, "La Silva 'El pincel' de Quevedo: La teoría pictórica y la alabanza de pintores al servicio del dogma contrarreformista," *Bulletin hispanique* 98, no. 1 (1996): 85–95.
15 Kelly Donahue-Wallace, *Jerónimo Antonio Gil and the Idea of the Spanish Enlightenment* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2017), 94–111.
16 Ibid., 110–11.
17 This inventory appears in Intestados, vol. 178, exp. 16, fols. 198–544, Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City. The book is listed as "Arte nuevo de escribir pr Palomares," fol. 386v. I thank Kelly Donahue-Wallace for generously sharing this archival information.
18 Intestados, vol. 178, exp. 16, fols. 198–544, Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City. These are listed as "Arte de escribir," fol. 387r; "Arte de escribir pr Polanco," fol. 389r.
19 Kelly Donahue-Wallace, "An Evangelist of Taste: The Book Collection of Jerónimo Antonio Gil," in *The Artist as Reader: On Education and Non-Education of Early Modern Artists*, ed. Heiko Damm, Michael Thimann, and Claus Zittel (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 489–508, particularly 500–502. On the open-shelf display and accessibility of objects, see Donahue-Wallace, *Jerónimo Antonio Gil*, 295–96.
20 The medal designs are discussed in Donahue-Wallace, *Jerónimo Antonio Gil*, 224–27.
21 Though less detailed than Donahue-Wallace's account, a discussion of this particular medal appears also in Ángel O. Navarro Zayas, "Proposed Design of a Commemorative Medal of the Battle of Pensacola (1781) by the Royal Academy of San Carlos," *Journal of Early American Numismatics* 3, no. 1 (2020): 1–9.
22 For basic information on the print, see New York Public Library Digital Collections, "Prise de Pensacola," https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47e0-f683-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99, accessed January 23, 2022.
23 Donahue-Wallace, *Jerónimo Antonio Gil*, 226–27.
24 The text reads: "La sovervia y orgullo yngles avatido a España."
25 The singular status is noted in Inmaculada Rodríguez Moya, *La mirada del virrey: Iconografía del poder en la Nueva España* (Castelló de la Plana, Spain: Universitat Jaume I, 2003), 97.
26 Elia Botello Miranda, Armando Arciniega, and Nora Pérez Castellanos, "Caracterización de materialies y técnicas en la pintura del Museo Nacional de Historia" (paper presented at Simposio

internacional: Desafíos ante el tiempo. 150 años de conservación de pintura en México, Session 3, October 11, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oq2qnABH3bo&t=957s, accessed September 24, 2022).

27 On the mechanisms of making the king "present" in New Spain and the relative paucity of portraiture within this system, see Michael Schreffler, *The Art of Allegiance: Visual Culture and Imperial Power in Baroque New Spain* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007), particularly 14–21.

28 I draw here on the best account of the jura, that in Guillermo Tovar de Teresa, "Arquitectura efímera y fiestas reales: La jura de Carlos IV en la ciudad de México en 1789," *Boletín del Museo e Instituto "Camón Aznar"* 48–49 (1992): 353–77.

29 This decision was likely undertaken by the architect Ignacio de Castera, who oversaw the decorations; on Castera's involvement, see Regina Hernández Franyuti, *Ignacio de Castera: Arquitecto y urbanista de la Ciudad de México, 1777–1811* (Mexico City: Instituto de Investigaciones Dr. José María Luis Mora, 1997), 86–91.

30 "Enfrente del Sagrario se puso un[a] pirám[id]e con el rey a caballo, que estaba muy bueno"; José Gómez, *Diario curioso y cuaderno de las cosas memorables en México durante el gobierno de Revillagigedo (1789–1794)*, ed. Ignacio González-Polo (Mexico City: Universidad Autónoma de México, 1986), 10.

31 "dos estatuas ecuestres de bronce sobre pedestales de mármol, tamaño del natural, la una del señor Carlos Tercero colocada en la esquina del cementerio de la cathedral . . . La otra del señor Carlos Cuarto, en la otra esquina del cementerio, vista al palacio"; quoted in Tovar de Teresa, "Arquitectura efímera," 269.

32 Elia Botello, private communication, June 16, 2022.

33 This source was first noted by Botello Miranda, Arciniega, and Pérez Castellanos, "Caracterización de materialies y técnicas."

34 This sumptuous false facade, recorded in an engraving by José Joaquín Fabregat, is mentioned or discussed in Francisco de la Maza, *La mitología clásica en el arte colonial de México* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1968); José Miguel Morales Folguera, *Cultura simbólica y arte efímero en la Nueva España* (Granada, Spain: Junta de Andalucía, 1991), 79–82; and Hernández Franyuti, *Ignacio de Castera*, 86–91.

35 "producirá un caracter fixo y *nacional*"; Palomares, *Arte nueva de escribir*, 38.

36 "los Discípulos aprender á escribir con fundamentos sólidos, y en ménos tiempo que por otros Artes, Nuestra letra nacional bastarda con desembarazo, libertad y gallardía . . . espíritu y buen gusto"; Estevan Ximénez, *Arte de escribir compuesto por D. Estevan Ximenez, siguiendo el metodo y buen gusto de D. Francisco Xavier de Santiago Palomares* (Madrid: Benito Cano, 1789).

37 The festivities are described in *Descripción de la fiestas celebradas en la imperial corte de México con motive de la solemne colocación de una estatua equestre de Nuestro augusto soberano el señor Don Carlos IV. en la Plaza Mayor* (Mexico City: n.p., 1796).

38 It has been suggested that this was the impetus to make the picture in the first place; see Hernández-Durán, "Language of Line."

39 A facsimile is reproduced as Pablo Martínez del Río, *Un arte de escribir del siglo XVIII: Apuntes para la historia del rasgueado en México* (Mexico City: Instituto de Historia; Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, 1955). To be clear, the treatise's author was not Rafael Ximeno y Planes, still in Madrid at this point, who would later arrive to lead the instruction of painting at the Academy of San Carlos.

40 Medina includes an entry for a similar book printed in 1790, but this seems to be erroneous; no copy of such book can be located; cf. José Toribio Medina, *La imprenta en México (1539–1821)*, 8 vols. (Santiago de Chile: José Toribio Medina, 1907), 6:570–71.

41 "Solo basta un solo Heroe un Sol Gallardo / Un Galves basta solo sin segundo / y basta un Andaluz SOLO BERNARDO"; Bruno Francisco Larrañaga and José Rafael Larrañaga, *El sol triunfante* (Mexico City: Frente de Afirmación Hispanista, 1990), 94.

42 "Tu eres honor del Reyno de las Indias / Por el Español Jove constituido / Tu eres Nuestro consuelo, dulce grato . . . Sol propicio / Pero ahora tu luz mueren los Astros / Y el orbe queda todo obscurecido"; ibid., 109.

43 See, for instance, the following excellent studies: Ann Jensen Adams, "Disciplining the Hand, Disciplining the Heart: Letter-Writing Paintings and Practices in Seventeenth-Century Holland," in *Love Letters: Dutch Genre Paintings in the Age of Vermeer*, ed. Peter C. Sutton et al. (Greenwich, CT: Bruce Museum, 2003), 63–76; Lee Hendrix and Thea Vignau-Wilberg, *The Art of the Pen: Calligraphy from the Court of the Emperor Rudolf II* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2003); and Ricky Jay, *Matthias Buchinger: "The Greatest German Living,"* exh. cat. (New York: Siglio, 2016).

44 See the already-canonical Elizabeth Hill Boone, *Stories in Red and Black: Pictorial Histories of the Aztecs and Mixtecs* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004); Joanne Rappaport and Tom Cummins, *Beyond the Lettered City: Indigenous Literacies in the Andes* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012); and Galen Brokaw, "Semiotics, Aesthetics, and the Quechua Concept of Quilca," in *Colonial Mediascapes: Sensory Worlds of the Early Americas*, ed. Matt Cohen and Jeffrey Glover (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014), 166–202.