

AN EVANGELIST OF TASTE.
THE BOOK COLLECTION OF JERÓNIMO ANTONIO GIL

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Three years after the Spanish conquest of the Aztecs, Fray Pedro de Gante's school at the chapel of San José de los Naturales in Mexico City formally introduced European artistic practices and tastes to the Indians of New Spain. As the missionary and his companions taught native artists to render forms according to Renaissance pictorial principles, they understood their actions to promote successful religious and social conversion, not just the alteration of artistic style. The transformation the indigenous artists supposedly underwent as they abandoned native pictorial practices and adopted European ways embodied their epistemological conversion; they were said to have adopted a European worldview and to have become good subjects of the Spanish Empire.¹ These neophytes then traveled to outlying mission complexes where the images they painted on the walls of newly-built churches were just as important to the evangelical effort – or perhaps even more so – as the catechisms and sermons the missionaries delivered.

Just over two hundred fifty years later, in 1778, the Spanish academician Jerónimo Antonio Gil [Fig. 1] crossed the Atlantic from Spain on a similar mission. His official purpose as the new principal engraver of the Royal Mint in Mexico City was to found a drawing school to reform coin production, correcting the defects in image-making that plagued the institution. Within five years, Gil's drawing classes became the Royal Academy of the Three Noble Arts of San Carlos with a teaching faculty soon hired from Spain.² Its students were Gil's neophytes, drawn this time not exclusively

¹ The reality, of course, was much more complicated as native peoples negotiated the new colonial context. An excellent study of this process is Peterson J., *The Paradise Gardens at Malinalco* (Austin: 1993).

² Gil initially staffed the school with Mexican artists but quickly added artists from Spain to serve as the institution's senior faculty. The local artists, including Francisco Clapera, Mariano Vázquez, and Andrés López, remained at the institution, serving in lesser roles.



Fig. 1. Tomás Suria, *Portrait of Jerónimo Antonio Gil*, ca. 1780. Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional.

from the Indian communities that Gante served – although several scholarships were reserved for native students – but also from New Spain's Spanish (known as Creole) and mixed race or *mestizo* populations.³ These latter colonists were those the state felt the most urgent need to draw into its bosom in the late colonial era. The survival of the colonial enterprise depended to a great extent upon a close, paternal relationship between the monarch in Madrid and his subjects across the Atlantic.⁴ Like the native artists who converted to Christianity and used their art to spread European practices to their local communities two centuries earlier, the Creole and *mestizo* academy students were to leave the institution to spread the new official artistic style and the loyalty to the state that it implied. Although Mexican art had certainly not rejected European influence since the days of Gante's school, local tastes had developed independently and sometimes in manners unappealing to Spanish academicians and imperial authorities. Rather than replace Pre-Columbian forms with Renaissance principles, these new artistic missionaries were to dislodge the late-baroque style of eighteenth-century New Spain in favor of the classical forms of contemporary European *buen gusto* or 'good taste' as promoted by the state and its institutions.⁵

The academy's role in the imposition of new tastes and the 'improvement' of local art and craft for economic and political ends is well known.⁶ In 1783, Jerónimo Antonio Gil wrote that in Mexico City there were:

more than forty workshops belonging to various people working in the areas of painting, sculpture, gilding, and altarscreen assemblage [...] who, without possessing the slightest knowledge of drawing, produce myriad imperfect

³ In colonial New Spain, 'Creole' referred to people of supposedly pure Spanish blood who were born in the Americas; *mestizos* were the product of mixing Spanish and Indian blood. A social hierarchy based on race known as the society of castes – *sociedad de castas* – was firmly entrenched in eighteenth-century New Spain.

⁴ This was particularly true as resentment grew in the eighteenth century over Bourbon centralizing reforms that limited local authority in favor of greater imperial control and the expulsion of the Jesuit Order in 1767 that alienated the New Spanish Creole population that had been educated by Society members.

⁵ Fuentes Rojas E., *La Academia de San Carlos y los Constructores del Neoclásico* (Mexico City: 2002) 15.

⁶ It is important to note that Mexican artists formed a short-lived academy several decades before Gil's arrival and classicizing tastes were not new in the region. But the Mexicans' vision of their work differed radically from the Spanish academicians'. On the first Mexican academy and other academic efforts, see Moyssen X., "La primera academia de pintura en México", *Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas* 9, 34 (1965) 15–30 and Ramírez Montes M., "En defensa de la pintura: Ciudad de México 1753", *Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas* 23, 78 (2001) 103–112.

works that horrify those who see them, and they receive in their homes various youths who with the pretext of being apprentices only help them with domestic chores.⁷

To remedy the problem, Gil recommended that all young fine and mechanical artists be required to study at his new academy. Similarly, in 1795, the recently-arrived Spanish faculty at the Mexican academy submitted a petition to the Vice-Regal government describing the 'confused horror and unpleasant mix of the three [architectural] orders [...] [and the] general monstrosity of the buildings that disfigure the streets of this beautiful capital, and which are ridiculous to the eyes of all intelligent men'.⁸ They demanded that the academy faculty control the design of future buildings. Colonial officials agreed and from that point forward only academicians could direct the construction of buildings in New Spain.⁹ While this influence over public works would eventually alter Mexico City's appearance, the monumental equestrian portrait of Charles IV and the renovated main plaza it occupied [Fig. 2], designed and executed by faculty of the Academy of San Carlos in 1796, made an immediate declaration of the new approach to image- and taste-making in the viceroyalty. The sculpture and square, commissioned by Viceroy Miguel de la Grúa Talamanca y Branciforte, Marquis of Branciforte, likewise illustrated the political purpose of the academy itself: to centralize authority in the age of the Bourbon reforms and to draw Mexicans closer to their distant sovereign.

The present study is a social history of Gil's personal collection of books and considers how his library operated, like Gil did himself at the Royal Mint and the Academy of San Carlos, as a tool for the transformation of Mexican tastes and the creation of the man of taste and good Spanish citizen. In addition to addressing the impact of selected titles on Gil's art

⁷ '[...] más de quarenta obradores de varios Sugetos que comerciando con los Ramos de Pintura, Escultura Dorado y Ensamblado, se llaman generalmente tratantes quienes sin poseer la más ligera luz del Dibujo expenden multitud de obras imperfectas, que horroriza el verlas, y reciben en sus casas varios Jovenes, que con el especioso pretexto de Discípulos, solo se dedican a servirlos en asuntos domésticos [...]'; Cited in Carrillo y Gariel A., *Datos sobre la Academia de San Carlos de Nueva España* (Mexico City: 1939) 21–22. All translations mine unless otherwise noted.

⁸ '[...] se ve con horror una confusa y desagradable mezcla de los Tres Ordenes [...] general monstruosidad de las fabricas que desfiguran las calles de esta Hermosa Capital y de ridiculo asunto a los ojos de todo hombre inteligente'. Cited in Carrillo y Gariel, *Datos* 34–35.

⁹ Fuentes Rojas, *Academia de San Carlos* 25. It should be noted that the academy attempted to secure the same privilege for painting and sculpture in 1799, but failed when colonial authorities feared the impoverishment of native craftsmen.



Fig. 2. José Joaquín Fabregat, *View of Main Square of Mexico City*, 1796. Austin, Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas.

and his students', the essay illustrates how Gil deployed his collection in light of his position as the principal proponent of academic tastes and principles in the Mexican capital. I argue that Gil consciously constructed and exploited his library as part of his larger agenda as the evangelist of good taste in late colonial Mexico City.

Jerónimo Antonio Gil was born in 1731 in Zamora, Spain. As a young man, Gil traveled to Madrid where, in 1754, he became one of the first pensioned students at the newly founded Royal Academy of Fine Arts of San Fernando.¹⁰ Working with engraver Tomás Francisco Prieto, Gil learned the arts of coin, medal, and copperplate engraving, but also completed courses in drawing before finishing his studies in 1758. Named 'Academic of Merit' by the Academy of San Fernando, Gil worked independently before applying unsuccessfully for the position of Director of Copperplate Engraving at San Fernando following the 1777 death of Juan Bernabé Palomino. Within one year, however, Gil received King Charles III's order to travel to Mexico City to lead the engraving office at New Spain's principal mint. Arriving on Mexican shores soon after, Gil worked at the Royal

¹⁰ Gil's biography is found in Báez Macías E., *Jerónimo Antonio Gil y su traducción de Gérard Audran* (Mexico City: 2001) 13.

Mint for the remainder of his life, ascending to the senior administrative rank of *Fiel administrador* in 1788, in addition to establishing the Royal Academy of the Three Noble Arts of San Carlos in 1783 and serving as its Director General with a lifetime appointment. Gil died in Mexico City on April 17, 1798.

Gil's library as described in his probate inventory was substantial, with 298 titles and 659 volumes.¹¹ The majority of the academician's books – 101 titles or 34% of the total – addressed religious themes including devotional and liturgical books, bibles, and a few theological treatises. Notable among these are the 19 volumes of the writings of Fray Luis de Granada (1504–1588) and 45 volumes of the complete writings of Fray Luis de la Puente (1554–1624), both prolific ascetic authors of Spain's Golden Age. Most religious titles in Gil's library, however, were smaller, devotional texts addressing daily prayers and pious exercises. Among these were José Barcía y Zambrana's *Despertador eucarístico* and *El hombre interior en la agonía y últimos momentos de la vida* by Vicente de el Seyxo.

Another 79 titles or 26.5% of Gil's library fall under the general rubric of history. The academician owned many texts on the history of Spain and the Americas in addition to chronicles of more distant locales and eras including Rome, Poland, Algeria, Sweden, and Turkey, and from antiquity to the present. Among this group, notable works include Father Juan de Mariana's *Historia general de España*, a Spanish translation of Laurence Echard's Roman history from Julius Caesar through Constantine, the Inca Garcilaso de la Vega's chronicle of Peru, and Alonso de Ercilla y Zúñiga's *La Araucana* on Chilean history. In light of the library owner's vocation, it seems likely that many of the historical titles appear in Gil's collection as much for their illustrations as for their texts. For example, Juan de Pineda y Salazar's three volume chronicle of the Order of the Golden Fleece may have appealed to Gil's interest in history, but was likely also attractive to the engraver and numismatist for its many illustrations of medals. Similarly, the texts narrating the installation of Spanish King Charles IV and the funeral of Archduke Albert II undoubtedly held allure for their engraved plates as well as for their historical records.

Not surprisingly, art, including bound volumes of images, treatises, and manuals, was the subject of another 52 titles (17%) in Gil's collection.¹²

¹¹ The inventory of books appears in AGN, *Intestados*, t. 178, exp. 16, fols. 381v–392. Unfortunately, the list's compilers employed a shorthand that does not permit every text to be conclusively identified.

¹² This number does not include Gil's 58 print portfolios containing over 1,200 prints.

Gil's bound collections of printed illustrations included the *Nouveau livre de dessin de Nicolas Poussin* published by the widow of Parisian publisher François de Poilly between 1693 and 1712; two volumes of Claude Lorrain's *Liber veritatis* published by John Boydell; and *A collection of 150 select views, in England, Scotland, and Ireland* published in 1781 by Paul Sandby. The other authors represented in his library included Vitruvius, Vignola, Leonardo da Vinci, and Giorgio Vasari as well as more recent writings by Spanish court artist Anton Rafael Mengs and the aesthetician Antonio Ponz. Gil additionally owned Juan Antonio Palomino's *Museo pictórico y escala óptica*, Felipe Guevara's *Comentarios sobre la pintura*, Manuel de Rueda's engraving manual, an edition of José de Ribera's *Cartilla para aprender a dibuxar*, and Juan de Arfe y Villafañe's *Varia conmensuración para la escultura y arquitectura*.¹³

Fiction, poetry, science, education, mathematics, and philosophy rounded out the library. Literary texts accounted for 9% of the academician's collection. Gil possessed 26 novels and books of poetry, from Cervantes' *Don Quijote* to the latest edition of *Robinson Crusoe*. Other literary titles to be found on his library shelves included the *Fábulas* of Félix María Samaniego, published in Madrid in 1797. Among the science and education titles, with fifteen and thirteen examples respectively, Gil owned Antoine Lavoisier's treatise on chemistry, José Cortés' *Fisionomía y varios secretos de naturaleza*, and two copies of the 1795 mineralogy text, *Elementos de orictognosia* by Andrés Manuel del Río. The remaining categories, including mathematics and philosophy, numbered no more than three titles each.

Amassing this collection was no small undertaking, considering that when Gil and his wife married neither had any belongings and his wife had no dowry.¹⁴ When he crossed the Atlantic to assume his position at the Royal Mint, he and his sons brought with them only three boxes of clothes and tools.¹⁵ Other items were sent separately for the support of the new engraving school. Gil received the first mint shipment of 24 crates of goods he ordered for his new drawing classes in 1779; additional objects,

¹³ These reading tastes were shared by fellow academician Manuel Tolsá, the director of sculpture who was perhaps the most successful of the Academy of San Carlos' Spanish faculty. Tolsá's library coincided in its inclusion of Vitruvius, Vignola, Arfe, Palomino, Andrea Palladio, and Mengs. See Armella de Aspe V., "Noticias singulares sobre la vida y obras de Manuel Tolsá", in *Manuel Tolsá. Nostalgia de lo 'antiguo' y arte ilustrado México-Valencia* (Valencia: 1998) 222–225.

¹⁴ AGN, *Intestados* fol. 402r.

¹⁵ Archivo General de Indias, *Ramo Contratación*, 5524, número 1, R.59.

tools, and books arrived later for the Royal Academy of San Carlos. But Gil was keen to distinguish his belongings from those collected for the institutions. His 1792 will is emphatic in its insistence that everything in his chambers at the Royal Mint belonged to him and not to that institution or to the Academy of San Carlos.¹⁶ Similarly, an 1801 letter in the archival record of Gil's probate explains that during his time in Mexico, Gil collected everything found in the inventory and that when he left Spain, he had only his tools and clothing.¹⁷ Therefore, it seems clear that the items in Gil's probate inventory are distinct from the goods he ordered from Spain to stock the mint and academy.¹⁸ Had it been otherwise, surely the institutions' administrators would not have permitted their eventual sale.

Turning to the library collection itself, the titles reveal much about Gil's approach to art and its teaching. The texts range from the practical, such as manuals, instructional pamphlets, and sample books of costumes and hairstyles, to more theoretical writings. Among the latter, the most significant text Gil possessed may have been *Reflexiones sobre la belleza y gusto en la Pintura* by German painter Anton Rafael Mengs, the court artist in Madrid with whom Gil shared an affinity for antiquity and the paintings of Raphael, Correggio, and Titian.¹⁹

More specifically, the inventory's entry 'Obras de Mengs por Azara' reveals that Gil owned the 1780 edition of Mengs' writings compiled by José Nicolás de Azara, a Spanish bureaucrat based in Rome for much of his career.²⁰ Following Mengs' death in 1779, Azara immediately began gathering and translating the painter's writings into Spanish as an homage to his colleague and to promote his aesthetic theories. These included

¹⁶ AGN, *Intestados* fol. 402v. Additional support for this position may be found in the fact that the goods sent to the mint and the academy included many examples of drawing and sculpture; neither appears in Gil's inventory.

¹⁷ AGN, *Intestados* 226–227.

¹⁸ The confusion seems to rest in early scholarship that identified books and other items as brought to Mexico City by or for Gil, and assumed that these ended up in his inventory. The lists of books that Gil ordered for his drawing students as cited by Diego Angulo Íñiguez and Eduardo Báez Macías, for example, include many authors and titles not in Gil's probate inventory. See Angulo Íñiguez D., *La academia de bellas artes de Méjico y sus pinturas españolas* (Sevilla: 1935) 20; and Báez Macías, *Jerónimo Antonio Gil* 15.

¹⁹ Gil possessed copies of paintings by all three as well as printed reproductions of their works.

²⁰ Since the text was likely published at the end of 1780, Gil purchased his copy while already on Mexican soil. A second edition appeared in 1797, but would not have made it across the Atlantic in time to be included in Gil's April 1798 inventory. On the 1780 edition, see Mengs A.R., *Reflexiones sobre la belleza y gusto en la pintura por Antonio Rafael Mengs*, introducción de Mercedes Agueda (Madrid: 1989).

Mengs' celebration of Greek art as closest to perfection, his dedication to study of selected ancient and Renaissance models, and his belief in art's superiority to nature in the quest for beauty. In these ideas, Mengs paralleled his friend and mentor, Johann Joachim Winckelmann. In fact, the first essay in Azara's edition, *Reflexiones de D. Antonio Rafael Mengs sobre la Belleza y Gusto en la Pintura* was likely written while Mengs and Winckelmann were engaged in a two-year dialogue that also resulted in the latter's 1764 *History of Ancient Art*.²¹ The 1780 edition also included Azara's commentary on the *Reflexiones*; *Pensamientos de D. Antonio Rafael Mengs sobre los grandes pintores: Rafael, Correggio, Tiziano y los antiguos*; Mengs' letters to several colleagues, including Spanish aesthetician Antonio Ponz; his lessons on painting; and his recommendations on the formation of a fine arts academy.

Gil's affinity for Mengs' ideas is clearly seen in such works as the medal he engraved to commemorate the 1796 renovation of Mexico City's Plaza Mayor with its equestrian sculpture of Charles IV [Fig. 3].²² Evoking the medals of antiquity, the obverse busts of King Charles and Queen María Luisa rest side by side in profile. Both preserve the nature of their robust and mature physical forms, yet embody Mengs' assertion that the artist can make visual the body's perfection through 'the precise drawing, the grandeur of the figure, the graceful attitude, the proportion of the members, the strength of the chest [...] the sincerity of the forehead and brows, the prudence in the eyes, the health [visible] in the cheeks, and loving grace of the mouth'.²³ With these qualities, the work of art can exceed the accidents of nature. The equestrian monument on the medal's reverse similarly presents the clarity and order Mengs championed over the extravagance, caprice, and 'ridiculous and vulgar contours' he saw in baroque structures.²⁴ Gil's reproduction of the yet-to-be installed monument likewise eschewed ornament for classical restraint.

Mengs' influence may be just as clearly illustrated in Gil's *magnum opus*: the Royal Academy of the Three Nobles Arts of San Carlos, its governing

²¹ Agueda Mercedes, "Introducción", in Mengs, *Reflexiones* 34.

²² The renovation and the sculpture, which would not be installed for almost another decade, are discussed in Charlot J., *Mexican Art and the Academy of San Carlos, 1785–1915* (Austin: 1962) 44–46 and *passim*.

²³ '[...] la exactitud del diseño, la grandiosidad en la figura, la soltura en la actitud, la proporción en los miembros, la fortaleza en el pecho [...] la sinceridad en la frente y en las cejas, la prudencia en los ojos, la salud en las mejillas, y la gracia amorosa en la boca'. Mengs, *Reflexiones* 11–12.

²⁴ '[...] contornos menudos y ridículos'. Mengs, *Reflexiones* 274.



Fig. 3. Jerónimo Antonio Gil, *Medal*, 1796.
Madrid, Fundación Lázaro Galdiano.

laws, and its curriculum. The statutes of the Academy of San Carlos, listed on Gil's probate inventory and seen below his hand in his portrait by Rafael Ximeno y Planes [Fig. 4], mirror Mengs' recommendations in the "Carta a un Amigo de D. Antonio Rafael Mengs sobre la constitución de una Academia de las Bellas Artes" from the 1780 edition. Likely written while Mengs was in Spain, the letter promotes the teaching role of the academy faculty, day classes for theoretical learning, and evening drawing sessions for students from all trades. It similarly recommends the development of an academic collection of exemplary art and texts, places all decisions on aesthetic matters firmly in the hands of the academy faculty, and declares that instruction should not take place in private workshops, but should instead occur in the academy's halls.²⁵ The Mexican academy's statutes, like the *plan de estudios* (plan of study or curriculum) written in 1790, similarly require that all students begin their studies in the drawing room learning 'rules and solid principles' by copying exemplary works and receiving correction by their faculty.²⁶ Only upon successfully completing their education in the fundamentals of drawing could students ascend to other courses of instruction within the institution. While not addressed in the statutes, on the issue of where instruction was to take place, Gil sided with Mengs, as discussed below.

But the book collection reveals still more about Jerónimo Antonio Gil and additional analysis requires locating the library within its own social and physical context. Gil's collection was more than an aesthetic exercise or a statement of social standing due to the reasons for which he was in

²⁵ Mengs, *Reflexiones* 391–404.

²⁶ '[...] reglas y principios sólidos'. Cited in Báez Macías E., "La Academia de San Carlos en la Nueva España como instrumento de cambio", in *Las academias de arte. VII Coloquio Internacional en Guanajuato* (Mexico City: 1985) 43.

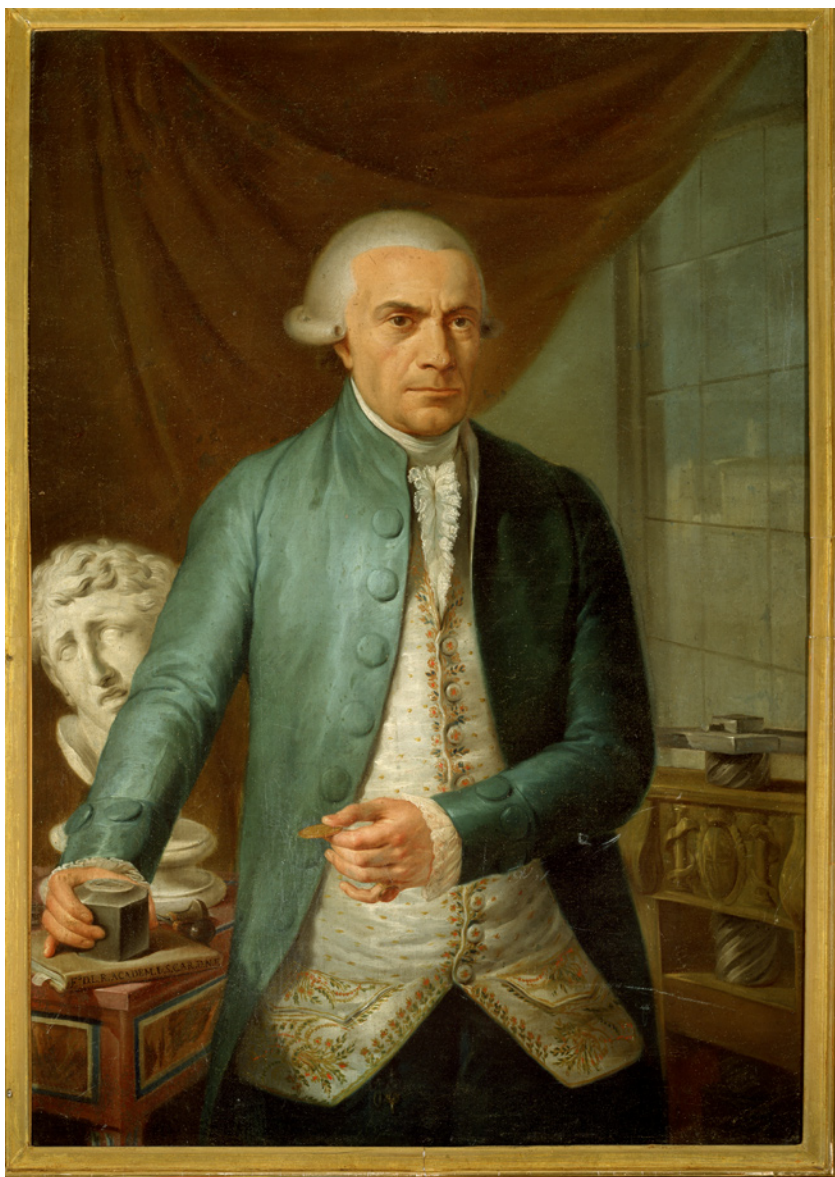


Fig. 4. [COL. PL. 16] Rafael Ximeno y Planes, *Portrait of Jerónimo Antonio Gil*, 1795. Mexico City, Museo Nacional de Arte.

Mexico in the first place. The library was part and parcel of his life's work: to transform the artistic tastes of colonists in New Spain and to develop good taste in the colony. Rather than the private collection designed to demonstrate the collector's taste or an academically-trained artist's library intended to support his own art making, Gil's was a quasi public collection cultivated for evangelical purposes. I base this argument in part on his role as founder of the Royal Academy of San Carlos, which would have immediately given his collection a certain authority. He was, after all, the representative of the king's tastes, and lacking a physically present king and royal library, Gil's books and his collecting efforts modeled good taste and learning.

The books' usefulness therefore extended beyond the artist himself as Gil's collection had a broader audience than most personal libraries. This is borne out by its location and its viewership. Gil did not live in a private home, and his books were not seen only by those invited to elegant parties and private audiences. He lived instead in rather ample rooms within the Royal Mint itself, a building fraught with potency within the colonial context. It was a royal building located beside the Vice-Regal palace, a symbol of the wealth of the Spanish Empire, a newly rebuilt structure – companion to the new Palace of Mining – reaffirming the central authority of Spain, and it was the source of coins that rested in virtually every Mexican's purse as ubiquitous reminders of Spanish imperial power. At the same time, the building represented Mexico's key role in propping up what little wealth the empire had left. Its silver coins reminded their viewers that places like Zacatecas in New Spain and Potosí in Peru kept Spain afloat. The building thus embodied both Spanish imperial authority and Mexican national pride; Gil's collection within could therefore not have existed as neutral furnishings or a private man's whim, and the library shared the aura of the place.

Moreover, from the moment that he arrived in Mexico City, Gil used his quarters within the mint to conduct classes. From his writing, we know that 300 or more students from all walks of life attended his evening drawing sessions in these rooms before the foundation of the academy. The architecture of the mint was even renovated soon after his arrival by Gil according to his specifications and the new didactic purpose of his space.²⁷

²⁷ The renovation is discussed in the "Proyecto para el establecimiento en México de una academia de las tres nobles artes" by mint administrator Martín de Mayorga. In *Proyecto, estatutos y demás documentos relacionados al establecimiento de la Real Academia*

Even after the Academy of San Carlos opened its doors, Gil continued to conduct these classes and additionally trained the academy's engravers in his quarters. The objects that he selected for display on the walls of his chambers and the books he selected for his library shelves must consequently have been carefully chosen with an eye towards this audience. His neophytes needed to be surrounded by works that would cultivate proper tastes and reinforce the artistic and social lessons they learned from their master.

That Gil thought of his chambers and his library as more than a living space and a private collection is made clear in his writings. In 1788, Gil responded to the protests of his Spanish faculty over a recent mandate that professors teach morning, afternoon, and evening hours at the academy rather than in private homes. The faculty complained that so many teaching hours did not allow for the completion of private commissions. Gil's response, based on Mengs' guidelines, included a justification for precluding faculty from teaching in their homes that offers insight into his perception of his own living situation. The professors' homes, Gil explained, did not provide students access to the works of art, tools, and, most importantly for the present study, books. Their homes did not preserve 'the being and essence of a Public School'.²⁸ The 1798 probate inventory reveals that the academy founder's quarters, on the other hand, had precisely these objects. Clearly, therefore, Gil's rooms within the Royal Mint were distinct, in his mind at least. Here students did have access to exemplary works of art and an ample library; their public education was furthered here.

Yet Gil's audience did not end with his students. The Royal Mint was an obligatory stop for every touring dignitary, every civic and religious procession, and every entering viceroy and archbishop. It was listed in the annual *Visitor's Guide* (*Guía de forasteros*) as a tourist attraction for foreigners. Alexander von Humboldt, for example, visited it five years after Gil died, and Fanny Calderón de la Barca and her husband even resided in Gil's former quarters during their diplomatic stay in 1841.²⁹ While we of course cannot tell if all parties who visited the Royal Mint entered Gil's

de pintura, escultura y arquitectura denominada de San Carlos de Nueva España (1781-1802) (Mexico City: 1984) n.p.

²⁸ '[...] el ser y esencia de Escuela Pública'. Cited in Báez Macías, *Jerónimo Antonio Gil* 24.

²⁹ Fisher H. – Fisher M. (eds.), *Life in Mexico. The Letters of Fanny Calderón de la Barca* (New York: 1966) 460–461.

chambers, it stands to reason that they did, perhaps precisely because of its collection and its celebrity owner. While the streets may have been filled with baroque monstrosities that horrified tasteful and intelligent viewers – according to the newly-arrived Spanish academicians, although most foreigners celebrated the city's beauty – Gil's person and his book collection testified to the efforts underway to remedy the situation; they showed taste in New Spain and a tasteful collection acquired entirely from this distance. No doubt Gil anticipated that there would be many collections like his soon to be found in the viceroyalty; he had forged the way and his model of selecting and acquiring works would soon be followed.³⁰

Another text in Gil's collection demonstrates how his dedication to his evangelical purpose exceeded merely making books available to his students and visitors. Here I refer to his Spanish translation of Audran's *Le proportions du corps humain*, which was written while still in Spain, but published in 1780.³¹ Although Gil's decision to translate Audran has been interpreted as an easy compromise, a text that was 'a most useful instrument, halfway between a pamphlet and a treatise, between a theoretical and cultured text and simple instructions given to those learning to read',³² it is clear that the text profoundly reflected its translator's ideas and interests as an artist and an academic administrator. Working apparently without patron or commission, Gil undoubtedly found something so important in Audran that he wanted to translate and endorse

³⁰ Jeremy Wood's discussion of English galleries of copies of Raphael and others bears this out, arguing that the copy galleries were created to instruct and reflected the 'belief that British history painting should be improved, while, at the same time, paying an elegant compliment to royal taste and collecting'. Wood J., "Raphael Copies and Exemplary Picture Galleries in Mid-Eighteenth-Century London", *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 62, 3 (1999) 399–400. Likewise, Gil is an example of a print collector attempting to reorient his people toward Europe, like Portuguese King John V, by ordering images from Europe. See Griffiths A., "Print Collecting in Rome, Paris, and London in the Early Eighteenth Century", *Harvard University Art Museums Bulletin* 2 (1994) 37.

³¹ Báez Macías, in his preliminary study of Gil's translation of Audran's text, wonders why Gil did not order copies of his book for the Royal Mint or for the Academy of San Carlos. He additionally says that the book was not in Gil's personal library. Here Báez is in error because four copies of Gil's Audran translation were found in his home, two bound and two unbound. See AGN, *Intestados* fol. 381v. Academician Manuel Tolsá also possessed a copy. See Armella de Aspe, "Noticias" 224.

³² '[...] un utilísimo instrumento, a medio camino entre el tratado y la cartilla, entre texto teórico, culto y la sencilla instrucción que se da para aprender a dibujar'. Báez Macías, *Jerónimo Antonio Gil* 57.

this text above others in his role as academician and representative of the king's taste.³³

Gil's words elucidate what he saw in Audran's text. In the editor's note he placed before the translation, Gil wrote:

One need only ponder what the author [Audran] writes in his Prologue, the great advantages that the use of said work may have for draftsmen. I only beg the professors of such noble arts, and in particular the students, for whose benefit I have engraved the figures, and have translated into Castilian their explanation, gaze continuously upon this work, and reflect upon the models presented here, because I judge them to be of the utmost importance for perfecting drawing.³⁴

This passage reveals that Gil, like Audran, promoted an art that was based on rules, order, symmetry, and balance.

Heeding Gil's advice and turning to Audran's Prologue reveals much about his motive for translating this text. Here Audran wrote of the diverse notions of beauty in different nations, influenced by such things as familiar surroundings and the natural climate. He concluded that in the face of this stylistic heterogeneity and competing visions of beauty, the only recourse for artists in all parts of the world was to return to the models of antiquity. Recall that Gil directed readers specifically to the prologue, noting that this was all that was necessary for the perfection of drawing. While Audran himself, writing in Paris in the late 1680s may not have thought of Spanish American artists when he made this recommendation for the homogenization of good taste in the face of regional diversity, Gil, making his translation either just before or soon after hearing of his reassignment to the New World, could certainly not have missed the implication. Faced with reforming the tasteless (even horrifying) approach

³³ While it is unclear when Gil had the idea to translate the text from French to Spanish, the book appeared in print in 1780, two years after the engraver was appointed to Mexico City's Royal Mint and one year after he arrived in New Spain. While the text was undoubtedly written while Gil remained in Spain, its printed title page clearly identifies him as Principal Engraver of the Royal Mint in Mexico and Academic of Merit of the Royal Academy of San Fernando. The text appears to have been produced at Gil's initiative, as no patron is identified in the book.

³⁴ 'No es necesario ponderar más de lo que el mismo autor hace en su Prólogo, las grandes ventajas que del uso de dicha obra pueden resultar a los dibujantes. Yo sólo suplico a los profesores de tan nobles artes, y en particular a los discípulos, para cuyo beneficio he grabado las figuras, y se ha puesto en castellano su explicación, que pasen la vista continuamente, y con reflexión por los modelos que aquí se les presentan, pues lo juzgo por de suma importancia para perfeccionarse en el dibujo'. Cited in Báez Macías, *Jerónimo Antonio Gil* 66.

to image-making in the Mexican mint, Gil may have found a ready solution in Audran's confidence in the universal beauty and unifying potential of drawing based on ancient models. Audran wrote that the Greeks and Romans did not let their passions control them and overcame nature to arrive at perfect beauty. Similarly, for eighteenth-century Spaniards and Spanish Americans familiar with Georges-Louis Leclerc Buffon's assertions of the physical and moral degradation of those living in the Americas, salvation rested in turning away from local tastes and passions and turning towards the universal beacon of European ancient models.³⁵ Redemption for the Mexican artists Gil was sent to train, according to Spanish imperial and academic authorities, lay only in rejecting the local in favor of the classical. Likewise, when Audran noted that like the ancient Greeks living under Alexander, his reader also lived in a glorious era (the age of Louis XIV, although Audran does not mention the French king by name), Gil may have seen a useful parallel with the reforming, enlightened Bourbon despot Charles III. Idealistic to be sure, Gil's attempt to use classical models and drawing to unify the diversity of tastes within the Spanish empire and bring its subjects closer to their king was entirely in keeping with his mission on American soil. The antidote to these hybrid tastes was the art of antiquity.

Comparing engravings by Gil and one of his Mexican students reveals precisely the homogenization the Audran text promised. The sobriety and restraint of Gil's 1782 engraving of Saint Philip of Neri [Fig. 5] is matched by the unornamented style and precise drawing found in the 1811 engraving of Faith [Fig. 6] by his pupil, José María Montes de Oca (1772–c.1825). Both employ a classicizing architectural framework and idealized forms drawn according to a classical canon of proportion.³⁶ Neither of the engravings has any note of idiosyncrasy or any unique cultural manifestation despite the fact that one was the effort of a transplanted Spaniard educated on the peninsula and the other was made by a Mexican, raised among the baroque constructions, that horrified Gil and the academy faculty. That such diverse artists should now draw virtually identical images undoubtedly proved to Gil the truth of Audran's words. Moreover, Montes de Oca's

³⁵ For a brilliant analysis of writing about the Americas, specifically its histories and people, as well as a discussion of the Spanish response to European writings on American history, see Cañizares-Esguerra J., *How to Write the History of the New World* (Stanford: 2001).

³⁶ On Montes de Oca, see Donahue-Wallace K., "El grabado en la Real Academia de San Carlos de Nueva España", *Tiempos de América* 11 (2004) 49–61.

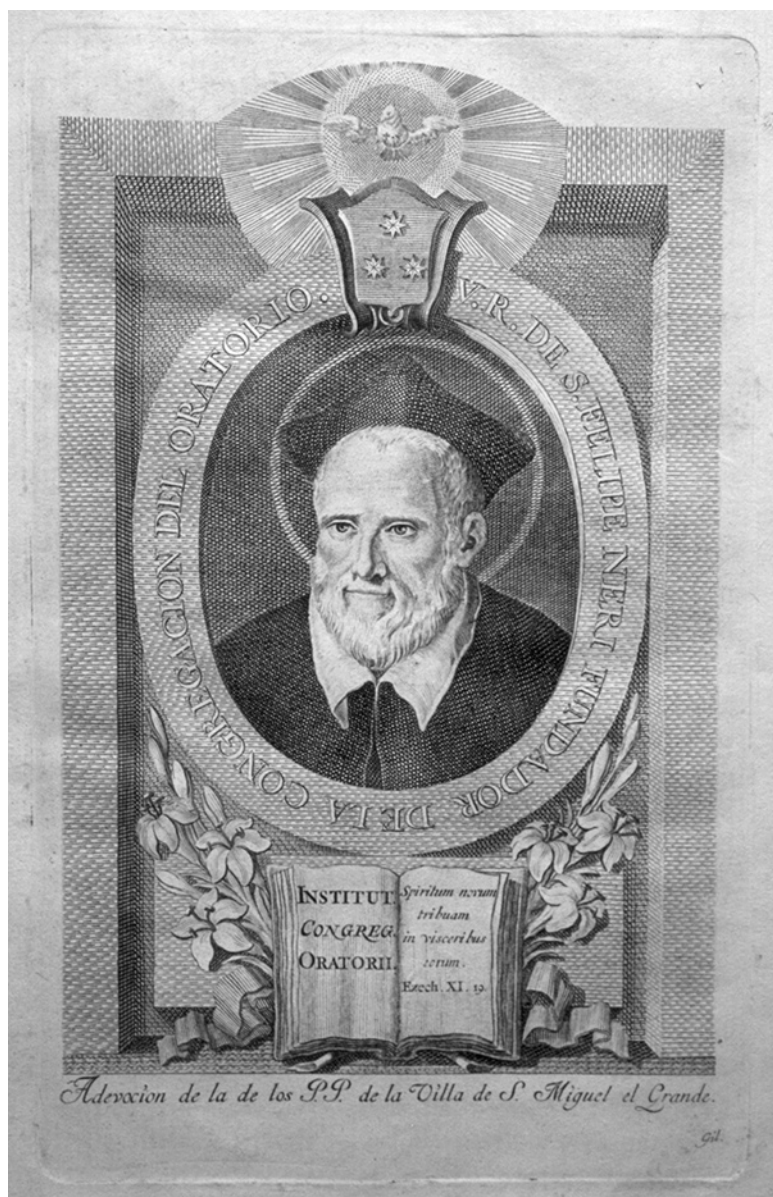


Fig. 5. Jerónimo Antonio Gil, *Saint Philip of Neri*, 1782. Austin, Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas.



Fig. 6. José María Montes de Oca, *Faith*, 1811. Austin, Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas.

adoption of ancient typologies demonstrated to Gil that his pedagogy of cultural immersion – instructing Montes de Oca within his chambers, surrounded by his didactic library and tasteful art collection – bore precisely the edifying fruit he pursued with his evangelical zeal; Montes de Oca had become an *hombre de gusto*, a man of taste.

The epilogue to this essay briefly chronicles what happened during the sale of Gil's book collection. Many of the texts were purchased by the probate inventory's assessor, José Azcárate del Corral, who undoubtedly re-sold them in his Mexico City shop. Another bookseller, José Gómez did likewise. Gil's colleagues at the Academy of San Carlos also purchased some of the books, including academy architect Luis Martín, engraver José Joaquín Fabregat, affiliated artist José Luis Rodríguez Alconedo, and students José María Picazo, Manuel López López, and Francisco Lindo. The academy library purchased nearly one dozen books. Mint employees Ignacio Carrillo, Luis Osorio, Bruno Gómez, Joaquín Casarín, and Manuel Mestre y Pardo bought books as well. Gil's probate sale also attracted buyers from New Spain's social elite including Antonio Recarey y Camaño, a Mexico City silver baron; Rafael Larrañaga, the representative of wealthy miner Antonio Otero of Guanajuato; José Antonio Cervantes y Cevallos, Marquis of Guardiola; and Juan Felipe Moradillos, the owner of Hacienda La Patera in nearby Tlanepantla.

The sale of Gil's books thus demonstrates the efficacy of his mission. As students from humble families and common mint employees stood beside merchants, titled nobility, newly-rich miners, and *hacienda* owners, Gil's evangelical effort came to fruition. The diverse and heterogeneous population of New Spain purchased and disseminated the texts and teachings of the king's representative of taste and loyalty, carrying on his collecting habits and the good taste and learning he promoted. While of course it is difficult to know whether these consumers felt the devotion to the crown for which the academy founder and his king hoped, they certainly had every opportunity to do so thanks to this evangelist of taste and his library.

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