

PRESS RELEASE

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THE FRICK COLLECTION

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STUNNING SET OF SPANISH BAROQUE WORKS TRAVELS TO THE UNITED STATES FOR THE FIRST TIME

Zurbarán's Jacob and His Twelve Sons: Paintings from Auckland Castle

SERIES HISTORICALLY CONNECTED TO MOVEMENT FOR RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE

January 31 through April 22, 2018



Zurbarán and other works on display in the Long Dining Room at Auckland Castle; photo credit: photo Colin Davison, courtesy of The Auckland Project

series of single-figure works representing the saints, the Apostles, and various other subjects for ecclesiastical institutions and palaces throughout Spain and the Spanish colonies. With a decline in Seville's economy in the 1640s and the plague of 1649, he turned increasingly to the Latin American market, supplying paintings on commission to churches, monasteries, and wealthy individuals, while also selling workshop pieces on the open market in Buenos Aires and Lima, Peru. Between 1640 and 1645, Zurbarán and his assistants produced the remarkable series *Jacob and His Twelve Sons*, which is on view at The Frick Collection through the spring of 2018. Co-organized by the Frick with the

Francisco de Zurbarán helped to define Seville's Golden Age, a period of economic expansion and cultural resurgence in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, when the Andalusian seaport monopolized trade with the New World. Throughout the late 1620s and 1630s, the artist and his workshop produced monumental multi-figure paintings as well as



Francisco de Zurbarán (1598–1664). *Joseph*, ca. 1640–45, oil on canvas, Auckland Castle, County Durham, © The Auckland Project/Zurbarán Trust, photo by Robert LaPrelle

Meadows Museum in Dallas and Auckland Castle, County Durham, England, the exhibition was first seen in Dallas last fall. Twelve of the paintings are lent by Auckland Castle. These are reunited with a thirteenth canvas, generously lent for both American presentations by Lady Willoughby de Eresby of Grimsthorpe Castle in Bourne, Lincolnshire. Zurbarán's work is well represented in public collections across the United States, but *Jacob and His Twelve Sons* is the first complete set of paintings by the Spanish master to be seen here, and the exhibition marks the first time that the Auckland/Grimsthorpe series has traveled to the United States.

AUCKLAND CASTLE RENOVATION PROVIDES OPPORTUNITY FOR TECHNICAL ANALYSIS AND TOUR



Auckland Castle, photo credit: Graeme Peacock, courtesy of The Auckland Project

In preparation for the showing in Dallas, *Jacob and His Twelve Sons* underwent a yearlong technical analysis led by Claire Barry, head of the conservation department at the Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth. The examination and the exhibition were prompted by the two-year renovation of Auckland Castle, the palatial residence for more than nine centuries of the powerful Prince Bishops of Durham. In 2018, the former bishop's residence will re-open under the auspices of The Auckland Project, formed to spur economic revitalization of the region. The *Jacob* series will return to its traditional place in the castle's Long Dining Room, where it has been displayed since 1756, the tutelary spirit of the project of regeneration.

EARLY HISTORY

As a theme, *Jacob and His Twelve Sons* had a place in the visual culture of Latin America, and two additional sets loosely related to the Auckland paintings can be found today in Peru and Mexico. Representations of Jacob and his sons also appeared in the form of ephemeral effigies carried in religious and civic processions, along with other biblical figures. Given the presence of this subject in painting and other media in the Spanish colonies and its absence in Zurbarán's Sevillian work, it is generally believed that the Auckland set was intended for export to the New World. The high quality of the set suggests that it was painted on commission, rather than for the open market. Yet no documents have emerged that shed light on the patron or the original destination of the thirteen canvases. Their whereabouts for nearly a century before appearing in London in the 1720s—the first works by Zurbarán to enter the British Isles—remains a mystery, adding to the interest and intrigue that surround the group.

ABOUT THE SUBJECT OF THE SERIES

The subject of the series comes from the Old Testament. Jacob, the son of Isaac and the grandson of Abraham, fathered twelve sons with his two wives, Leah and Rachel, and two concubines, Bilhah and Zilpah. The sons are considered to be the progenitors of the Twelve Tribes of Israel and the forefathers of the Jewish people. In Christianity, Jacob is seen as a prefiguration of Christ, and his sons as antecedents of the twelve apostles. Zurbarán's



Zurbarán, *Jacob*, ca. 1640–45, oil on canvas, 79 1/8 x 40 5/16 inches (201 x 102.4 cm), © The Auckland Project/Zurbarán Trust, photo credit: Robert LaPrelle

primary biblical source for the paintings was the “The Blessings of Jacob,” a prophetic poem in Chapter 49 of Genesis. In developing the iconography of the series, Zurbarán also drew from visual sources. A posthumous inventory of his studio revealed some seventy sixteenth- and seventeenth-century northern European prints that he mined for poses and gestures for this series and other works, as well as costume elements and attributes. For the Auckland paintings, Zurbarán turned largely to engravings depicting Jacob and his twelve sons that were executed in 1589 by Jacques de Gheyn II, after designs by Karel van Mander I. The expressive and highly distinctive faces of each son, however, suggest that they were painted from life. On canvases measuring nearly seven feet in height, full-length figures wearing sumptuous, exotic costumes tower over varied landscapes. Each son is rendered with a strong sense of individuality, while forming part of a cohesive, choreographed group, as if participants in a procession. The works are unsigned, indicating that they were carried out with the participation of assistants. However, the recent conservation study has revealed evidence of techniques specific to Zurbarán, confirming his high level of involvement.

On his deathbed, Jacob assembled his sons to foretell what was to become of them and their tribes. Judah was an ancestor of kings David and Solomon, and, in the Christian tradition, of Jesus. To him Jacob said, “Judah, your brothers shall praise you; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father’s sons shall bow down before you. Judah is a lion’s whelp . . . The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet.” Underlining his status, Zurbarán presented Judah frontally, as the most regal and imposing of all the sons in the series. He is clothed opulently with a crown, scepter, fur stole, and crouching lion. Joseph, Jacob’s favorite son, was sold into slavery by his jealous brothers and taken to Egypt, where he rose to a high station. His luxurious robes and turban,



Zurbarán, *Asher*, ca. 1640–45, oil on canvas, Auckland Castle, County Durham, © The Auckland Project, photo by Robert LaPrelle

as well as the rod and document he holds, denote his status as a viceroy in the court of the Egyptian pharaoh (see illustration on front page). In contrast to Joseph’s stately posture and rich attire, Benjamin, the youngest son, is depicted in country dress in an active twisting pose, seen from the back. The wolf, which he holds by a chain, derives from his blessing: “Benjamin is a ravenous wolf, in the morning devouring the prey, and at evening dividing the spoil,” a reference to his tribe’s reputation for fierceness in battle. Some brothers received less favorable prophesies. Describing his eldest son, Reuben, as “unstable as water,” Jacob stated, “you shall no longer excel because you went up onto your father’s bed; then you defiled it,” a reference to Reuben sleeping with Jacob’s concubine, Bilhah, as told in an earlier chapter in Genesis. In keeping with his status as firstborn, Reuben wears an elaborate costume and leans against a column, signifying his strength and fortitude. His downcast, shaded eyes and inward expression, however, reflect Jacob’s



Zurbarán, *Benjamin*, ca. 1640–45, oil on canvas, Grimsthorpe Castle, Lincolnshire © Grimsthorpe and Drummond Castle Trust, photo by Robert LaPrelle

prediction that Reuben would not thrive. Asher, a prosperous farmer, is shown in profile, his overflowing basket of bread a prefiguration of the Eucharist. This magnificent still life showcases Zurbarán's proficiency in the genre.

THE LOST TRIBES

As told in passages in other Old Testament books, all but one son was allotted territory. Judah and Benjamin occupied the smaller southern region of Israel around Jerusalem, with the other tribes settling in the north. In the eighth century BCE, the Assyrian king Shalmaneser invaded the northern kingdom and drove out its inhabitants. The fate of the ten northern tribes after the Assyrian invasion was a hotly contested issue during Zurbarán's time, providing a contemporary context for the series. Some religious scholars maintained that the exiled Israelites settled in various Mesopotamian cities and gradually assimilated into Assyrian life. Others, pointing to one of the books of the Apocrypha (texts of unknown origin, which, in the Catholic tradition, are included in the Old Testament), asserted that the tribes remained intact somewhere in the margins of the globe. As stated in 2 Esdras in the Apocrypha, the tribes fled "to a more distant region, where no human beings had ever lived," giving rise to the notion of the Ten Lost Tribes.

Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spanish missionaries and chroniclers claimed that the indigenous population of South America was descended from the Lost Tribes, basing their argument on perceived similarities in appearance, religious customs, and language between the Jews and the native peoples. This alleged connection provided a means of explaining the existence of the inhabitants of the New World within the Biblical narrative of Adam and Eve and the origin of mankind. It served as well to justify the conversion of the native population to Catholicism by tracing their ancestry back to ancient Israel, ignoring their own history. Images of the sons of Jacob, displayed in Latin American churches and monasteries, would have brought to life these supposed Biblical ancestors.

TRANSMITTING A MESSAGE OF RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE

The absence of a documented commission for Jacob and His Twelve Sons or any knowledge of its original setting leaves many issues open to speculation. In the mid-twentieth century, a leading scholar proposed the colorful theory that the paintings had been en route to South America when they were seized by pirates and taken to England as booty. It is now generally believed that the set did not leave Spain until it was imported to London in the early eighteenth century. There it was sold at auction in 1727–28 to James Mendez, a Portuguese Jewish merchant and collector. On his death, in 1756, twelve of the paintings were purchased by the Bishop of Durham, Richard Trevor, while the thirteenth canvas, *Benjamin*, fell to another bidder. It subsequently passed into the Willoughby de Eresby family of Grimsthorpe Castle, still its home today.

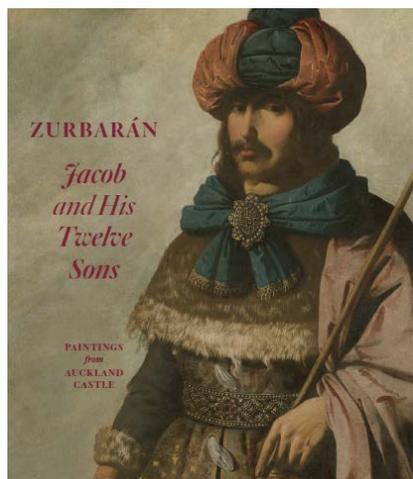
An ardent promoter of religious tolerance and an advocate for the rights of both Jews and Catholics, Bishop Trevor most likely acquired the series for its subject matter. The passage of the Jewish Naturalization Bill in 1753, which extended the rights of Jews, was carried out with his strong support. Within a year, however, the bill was repealed in the wake of virulent anti-Semitism. Trevor bought the series soon afterwards and commissioned a copy of *Benjamin*

to complete the set, installing the paintings in the Long Dining Room of Auckland Castle, illustrated above. In that setting, the powerful bishop welcomed Britain's most influential figures with the Twelve Tribes surrounding him, conveying a message of religious tolerance and inclusion and which remains vibrant today.

ABOUT THE AUCKLAND PROJECT

In 2010, the Zurbarán series was in danger of being sold off by the Church of England Commission. Two years later, Jonathan Ruffer, a philanthropic financier and native of northeastern England, acquired the paintings to preserve them for the nation, and he purchased the castle as well. The former bishop's palace is now being transformed into a world-class heritage center as part of The Auckland Project, whose mission is the economic revitalization of the town and region. In addition to the first phase, the renovation of the castle, The Auckland Project will include the creation of a Faith Museum, a Spanish Gallery and Research Center, and a Mining Art Gallery, among other sites of cultural interest.

PUBLICATION



A catalogue exploring the historical, religious, and artistic perspectives on these paintings was co-edited by Dr. Susan Grace Galassi, Senior Curator, The Frick Collection; Dr. Edward Payne, Senior Curator, Spanish Art, The Auckland Project, County Durham, and Mark A. Roglán, Director, the Meadows Museum, Southern Methodist University, Dallas. In addition to the catalogue section with entries by Payne, the catalogue contains art historical essays by: Dr. Jonathon Brown, Carroll and Milton Petrie Professor of Fine Arts (retired), New York University; Dr. John Barton, Oriel and Laing Professor of the Interpretation of Holy Scripture, Emeritus, at Oxford University; Dr. Christopher Ferguson, Curatorial, Conservation and Exhibitions Director, Auckland Castle; Dr.

Alexandra Letvin, Philadelphia Museum of Art; Akemi Herráez Vossbrink, PhD Candidate, University of Cambridge; Susan Galassi; and a technical essay authored by Claire Barry, Director of Conservation at the Kimbell Art Museum. The catalogue includes conservation appendices on canvas-weave analysis and print sources, co-authored by Dr. Don H. Johnson and Barry and Rafael Barrientos Martinez and Barry, respectively, as well as a postscript by Dr. Gabriele Finaldi, Director of the National Gallery, London. Published by the Centro de Estudios Europa Hispánica and the Meadows Museum, the book is available in the Museum Shop or can be ordered through the Frick's Web site (frick.org) or by phone at 212.547.6848. Hardcover (136 pages; \$45, member price \$40.50).

This exhibition has been organized by Susan Grace Galassi, Senior Curator at The Frick Collection; Mark A. Roglán, Director of The Meadows Museum; and Amanda Dotseth, Meadows/Mellon/Prado Postdoctoral Fellow at The Meadows Museum. Principal funding for the New York exhibition is provided by an anonymous gift in memory of Melvin R. Seiden and by The Christian Humann Foundation. Additional support is provided by the David Berg Foundation, Margot and Jerry Bogert, Francis Finlay, Northern Trust, an anonymous gift in memory of Charles

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INTERACT

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BASIC INFORMATION

General Information Phone: 212.288.0700

Web site: www.frick.org

Building project: www.frickfuture.org

E-mail: info@frick.org

App: frick.org/app

Museum address: 1 East 70th Street, near Fifth Avenue

Hours: Open six days a week: 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. on Tuesdays through Saturdays; 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on Sundays. Closed Mondays, New Year's Day, Independence Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas Day. Limited hours (11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.) on Lincoln's Birthday, Election Day, and Veterans Day

Admission: \$22; senior citizens \$17; students \$12; Pay-what-you-wish hours on Wednesdays from 2:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.

PLEASE NOTE TO YOUR READERS: Children under ten are not admitted to the museum

First Fridays: Museum admission and gallery programs are free from 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. on the first Friday evening of the month (except January and September)

Subway: #6 local to 68th Street station; #Q to 72nd Street station; Bus: M1, M2, M3, and M4 southbound on Fifth Avenue to 72nd Street and northbound on Madison Avenue to 70th Street

Tour Information: Included in the price of museum admission is an Acoustiguide Audio Tour of the permanent collection. The tour is offered in six languages: English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, and Spanish.

Shop: The shop is open the same days as the museum, closing fifteen minutes before the institution.

Group Museum Visits: Please call 212.288.0700 for details and to make reservations.

Public Programs: A calendar of events is available online

Library address: 10 East 71st Street, near Fifth Avenue

Hours: www.frick.org/visit/library/hours

Admission: Open to the public free of charge

#321, December 14, 2017 (Updated January 23, 2018)

For further press information about The Frick Collection and about this exhibition, please contact Media Relations & Marketing; Phone: 212.547.0710; E-mail: mediarelations@frick.org

For further information about The Auckland Project, please contact Ann Cooper, Head of Communications; Phone: 01388 743 799; E-mail: ann.cooper@aucklandproject.org