

John Frederick Lewis, R.A.



The Spy

Reference: 11232

Watercolour with bodycolour, gum arabic and scratching out, in original exhibition frame, the frame numbered No 35, with labels verso, one reading: The capture of a Spanish Spy/With a Portrait of the Carlist/General-Zumala Carregui/(in red cap & trousers)/By Lewis R.A.

53.2 x 72.5 cm; 21 x 29 inches

Provenance

Sir Arthur Ernest Blake; Possibly Evelyn Isabel Bond née Blake; By family descent to Major-General Mark Bond, OBE, (1922-2017) of Moigne Combe, Dorchester, Dorset; By family descent until 2019

Exhibited

Society of Painters in Water Colours, 1837, no.316 A Spy of the Christino Army brought before the Carlist General in Chief, Zumalacarregui; Royal Academy Winter Exhibition 1891, no.138 CAPTURE OF A SPANISH SPY. [lent by] Arthur Blake Esq

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Literature

Literary Gazette, 1837, no.1058, April 29, pp. 272-73;Athenaeum, 1837, p. 308;The Spectator Vol. 10, week ending April 29, 1837, p.402;Art Journal 38, 1858, p.42, illus. p.41;William Sandby, The History of the Royal Academy of Arts, from its Foundation in 1758 to the Present Time. With Biographical Notices of All the Members, London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts; Green, 1862, vol. ii, p.340;Illustrated London News, 25 March 1865, p.285;Athenaeum;Obituary, p. 278;The Graphic, Obituary, 26 August 1876, p.204;Morning Post 3 January 1889;John Lewis Roget, A History of the 'Old Water-Colour' Society now the Royal Society of Painters in Water Colours, London & New York: Longmans, Green, and Co, 1891, vol. 2, bk. 8, p.138;Claude Phillips, 'John Frederick Lewis, R.A.', in the Portfolio, Philip Gilbert Hamerton ed., London: Seeley ; Co., 1892, p.93;The Old Water-Colour Society's Club 1925-1926 vol. iii, 1926, p.33;Hugh Stokes, 'John Frederick Lewis R.A. (1805-1876)', Walkers Quarterly, No. 28, London: Walker's Galleries, 1929, p.18;Brinsley Ford, 'J.F.Lewis and Richard Ford in Seville', 1832-33, The Burlington Magazine, May 1942, pp.128;Nicholas Tromans, 'J. F. Lewis's Carlist War subjects', The Burlington Magazine vol. cxxxix, no.1136, November 1997, pp.760-762, illus. fig 48. (the print)

Engraved

By C.G. Lewis, 1840, published May 1, 1840 by Hodgson & Graves, 6 Pall Mall; the final state, etched and engraved by F.C. and C.G. Lewis, published in 1841

The rediscovery of this major watercolour by J.F. Lewis, famous in its day, after 128 years, is the cause of some excitement. The artist often dealt in the unexpected, and the unusual nature of this picture is best described in his own words which accompanied it when he exhibited it at the Society of Painters in Water Colours in 1837:

"no.316 A Spy of the Christino Army brought before the Carlist General in Chief, Zumalacárregui. In the Basque provinces, Navarre, &c. the present seat of civil war in Spain, the peasantry were constantly pressed into the service of the contending powers to convey intelligence from one general to another. It is needless to add, that when taken by the opposite party, they were instantly shot. The present subject represents the arrest of a peasant and his family. A monk is shewing to the Carlist chief, Zumalacárregui, (who is standing at a table to the left of the picture) the dispatches found upon him. The portrait of the general has been done from sketches and descriptions kindly given to the artist by Captain Henningsen, his late aide-de-camp. He is dressed simply in the red cap, and zamarra, or jacket of sheepskin, worn ordinarily by him, in common with all classes of the Basque provinces, and indeed he was remarkable for his total neglect of military costume. To his left is his secretary, and behind him is an aide-de-camp. The priest is supposed to be the celebrated Curé Merino, &c. &c. See 'A Twelvemonth's Campaign with Zumalucarregui', by Capt. Henningsen. For price apply to Mr. Lewis, 78 Wimpole Street, Sold order of Mr. Lewis."

The first Carlist war was fought from 1833 to 1840, between the supporters of the Regent, Maria Christina, (hence the term Cristinos) acting for the infant Queen Isabella II of Spain, and those of the late King's Ferdinand VII's brother, Carlos de Borbón (hence Carlists). The Carlists invoked Salic Law in order to promote an autocratic monarchy espousing 'God, Country and King', whereas Isabella had Liberal supporters. After the proclamation of Don Carlos's bid for the throne, the progress of the conflict was eagerly followed in Britain, and, as with the Spanish Civil War of 1936-39, divided opinion, and attracted participants on both sides from other countries. The fighting in the first war was mainly carried out in the

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Basque Country, Aragon, Catalonia and Valencia. It continued over the course of the nineteenth century, with two further wars, and into the twentieth century, as a minor aspect of the origins of the Spanish Civil War.

As Lewis described above, Captain Charles Frederick Henningsen, (1815-1877), of Danish and Irish descent, volunteered and served as an aide-de-camp to General Tomás de Zumalacárregui e Imaz, the Basque leader of the Carlist forces. After successfully publishing his controversial book about his experiences in the war, Henningsen met Lewis in London or Paris, where the artist apparently hatched the plan to paint a topical modern history work, featuring Henningsen, the controversial figure of Zumalacárregui, and the sanguinary priest, the Cura Merino.

Lewis obtained some rough pen and ink annotated sketches from Henningsen, two of which, wrongly attributed to Lewis himself, are part of a group of sketches bequeathed to the V&A by Marian Lewis in 1908, and another, a pen and ink sketch of Zumalacárregui (also traditionally wrongly attributed to Lewis), is in a private collection. Henningsen probably also gave Lewis the famous red cap worn by Zumalacárregui, which was last seen as lot 518 in Lewis' studio sale, (Christie's, 4 May 1877), described as Crimson cloth hat of Zumalacaraguy. The artist had returned from Spain in 1833, before the hostilities had started in earnest. As Lewis had never met the principal protagonists, he relied on Henningsen to provide the information and some annotated sketches of them.

At least parts of this picture appear to have been painted in Paris. William Callow, who did not return to Britain from France until 1841 recalled, many years later, that : 'On several occasions I posed for him as a model, once for my ear, and on another occasion wearing a cap of Zumalacarrequi [sic], a Spanish chieftain' (W. Callow: An Autobiography, ed. H.M.Cundall, London [1908], pp.26-27). However, it seems likely that the aged Callow may have been conflating more than one visit to Paris by Lewis.

Lewis has been given the popular epithet Spanish Lewis, for successfully exhibiting and selling a large number of watercolours of Spain and its peoples. Lewis's friend and mentor, David Wilkie, had set a precedent for modern history painting of this type, with the Defence of Saragossa, (1828) and, in particular, The Spanish Posada: A Guerrilla Council of War (1828, both Royal Collection), both of which depict scenes from the Napoleonic Wars.

Although the picture was conceived as a relatively simple dramatic tableau, Lewis characteristically gave the protagonists subtle expressions appropriate to their roles. General Zumalacárregui in his red cap, cigarette in hand, is shown with his customary stern demeanour, heightened by his grim expression on seeing the evidence. Seated in the centre is the priest and army commander, Cura Jerónimo Merino Cob, who like Zumalacárregui, had fought as a merciless guerrilla leader in the Peninsular wars. He holds up the damning dispatches, his face a picture of sinister, quiet triumph, as he shows the evidence that will condemn the forlorn prisoner, who is consumed with conflicting disbelief at his imminent fate. The expression of confusion of the puzzled little boy and the abject sadness of his mother, the prisoner's wife, add to the tension of the scene. To the left is a portrait of Captain Henningsen in profile, in a dark green uniform, his massive chest appropriate for a cavalry officer of the time. Even the dog seems to be aware of the acute tension in the room.

Like many of Lewis's paintings, the present work was favourably reviewed in the contemporary press. However, there is also the ambiguity found in many of his other pictures. Depending on your point of view, it can be seen as an illustration of the ruthless cruelty of the Carlist General Zumalacárregui and the tragedy of the unfortunate spy and his family, or, as

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in Henningsen's eyes, it could reflect the stern nature and skill of the General, and the legitimacy of his cause. In 1838, Lewis exhibited another scene from the Carlist Wars, entitled 'The Pillage of a Convent, in Spain, by Guerilla Soldiers' (private collection).

The subject of 'The Spy' became well known as it was widely circulated by a large etching and mezzotint made by the artist's father, F.C. Lewis, and his brother, C.G. Lewis, with the more emotive title, 'The Spanish Wife's Last Appeal', and issued from 1840 through to final publication in June 1841. The Art Union (June, 1840, p.92) records the print:

'Zamalarregui and the Christino Spy: Of this print, too, an etching has been issued. It is in process of engraving by J. F. Lewis;[sic] from one of the most famous pictures of his brother. The scene it depicts has been common enough during the civil war in Spain; the Guerilla chief is represented ordering off to execution a Christino spy, whose wife intercedes in vain for his pardon. The doomed man is led away, between guards; while the famous Cure Merino produces the written proof of his guilt. Behind Zamalarregui [sic] is the English Captain Heinengen,[sic] the chronicler of his exploits. The subject is well composed; skilfully grouped; and conveys an impressive idea of a frightful passage in a most appalling and revolting war. The likeness of the great Carlist leader is said to be a striking one—it is the portrait of a man of great energy, but of merciless character, from whose sentence there is no appeal. The print will be interesting because of its novelty, as well as its merits as a work of art'.

The mistakes in the names in the Art Journal article might be because the printers could not read the unfamiliar names in the handwriting of the Art Union correspondent - often the case with newspapers of the time. There was considerable contemporary public indignation in Britain at the savage treatment of spies on both sides in the Carlist War.

Lewis also made four studies for at least one other Carlist war picture, never realized, allegedly titled 'The Proclamation of Don Carlos'. One of these, now in the collection of the Morgan Library & Museum, New York (1977.31), shows Zumalacárregui in the same pose, but commanding at a battle or siege.

Zumalacárregui's family home in the Basque country, Spain, is now a museum devoted to him, the Museo Zumalakarregi in Ormaiztegui (Gipuzkoa). The collection includes pieces from the Carlist Wars, personal and military belongings of Tomás Zumalacárregui and his family as well as other material from the period.

The general has been credited with the invention of the tortilla or Spanish omelette. Apparently during the Bilbao siege in 1835 he created it to feed his troops. Legend also has it that Zumalacárregui copied the recipe from a peasant woman who gave him dinner on one occasion.

To be included in the forthcoming catalogue raisonné of the work of J.F. Lewis by the late Briony Llewellyn and Charles Newton. We are most grateful to Charles Newton for assistance with this footnote.