



## Hispanic Research Journal

### Iberian and Latin American Studies

## Dibujos de Manuel Salvador Carmona (1734–1820)

By Ana Hernández Pugh. Madrid: Museo Nacional del Prado; CEEH, 2023. Pp. 667. €57,70 (hardback). ISBN 9788418760150

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First published in September 2023, this catalogue raisonné commemorated the two hundred and forty years since Manuel Salvador Carmona was appointed *grabador de cámara* to the court of Carlos III. It is a major contribution to our knowledge of the history of drawing in Spain, as well as an illuminating study of the work of an important artist who has never quite regained the professional distinction he achieved during his lifetime.

Known for his drawings and prints, his dedication to portrait engraving, and his facility with chalk, ink, and wash, Carmona was a star at the Real Academia de San Fernando in Madrid where in 1777 he became Professor of engraving. He had already been singled out as a student in 1761 when he was sent on a scholarship to Paris and admitted to the French academy. A leading pupil in the studio of Nicolas-Gabriel Dupuis (1698–1771), Carmona returned to Madrid in 1763 and became *académico de mérito* with dizzying speed. This promising career was crowned both personally and professionally in 1783 when he married the daughter of the most powerful and influential painter at the Spanish court, the Bohemian Anton Rafael Mengs (1728–1779).

In his Preface (7), José Manuel Matilla writes that Carmona's early biographers almost exclusively analyzed the artist's prolific production of prints. His skill as a draughtsman was regarded as a marginal activity. This catalogue however throws new light on the scholars and collectors who acquired and preserved the drawings that Carmona also produced with tireless industry throughout his life. Valentín Carderera (1796–1880) and Felix Boix (1838–1932) are among the most important figures to lend their enduring support to the survival and appreciation of Carmona's posthumous reputation as a major draughtsman of Enlightenment Spain. The essay by Ana Hernández Pugh, "Colecciones y coleccionistas de dibujos de Manuel Salvador Carmona," is a major piece of research and demonstrates how significant articles and exhibitions, all of them carefully listed, have contributed to understanding the artist's true stature in the two centuries since his death.

Building up a successful career as the engraver of royal portraits, Carmona became part of a group of engravers who primarily served the interests of the state. These *hijos de la academia* helped to inspire the creation of the Calcografía Real in 1789. The catalogue, however, devoted exclusively to Carmona's drawings rather than his record as an engraver, reveals newly discovered work of unusual facility and is divided into four sections. The dated pieces show early sketches and copies after old masters; Academy drawings from models reveal the extent of the artist's command of anatomy. The third section, *Retratos del Natural*, offers a range of intimate portrait drawings which are often highly finished. A child holding a painted doll, her hair as elaborate as a high-class courtesan (fig. 203), reminds us how much Carmona had learned from the drawings of Watteau and Boucher; portraits of friends and family offer the spectator a glittering repertoire of sketching techniques. Highly finished images on tinted paper, with wash overlaying precise strokes of red and black chalk, display an uncanny sense of animation. These small masterpieces show how much Carmona brought to the development of drawing at the Spanish academy. The fourth section includes disputed works and a group of male nudes, the anatomical awkwardness and general execution so poor, it is mystifying why these works could ever have been attributed to so talented a draughtsman.

The catalogue owes much to the late Juan Carrete Parrondo (1944–2023), former Director of the Calcografía Nacional, whose extensive research over many years has contributed much to Carmona's growing posthumous recognition, and it is fitting that this publication is dedicated to his memory.

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<https://doi.org/10.1080/14682737.2025.2655540>

