



## **St. Ginés de la Jara, Luisa Roldán**

### **St. Ginés de la Jara**

Luisa Roldán

Spanish, about 1692

Polychromed wood (pine and cedar) with  
glass eyes

5 ft. 9 1/4 in. x 3 ft. 3/16 in. x 2 ft. 5 1/8 in.

85.SD.161



### **Questions for Teaching**

What are your first impressions of the sculpture? What details do you notice? (One of the most striking elements of this sculpture is its intense realism. Note the details of the facial features, the veins, the toenails and the ears.)

What do you notice about the person depicted here? What clues do you see that make you say so?

What do you notice about his clothing? What shapes and patterns do you see? (The floral motif is called the *fleur-de-lis*, a symbol of the French royal family. This design was created by a technique called *estofado*. See the Background Information below for more information about *estofado*.)

What can you tell me about the man represented by this sculpture? Based on his gesture and expression, what do you think he is doing?

Based on his clothing and appearance, who do you think this man might have been?

How do you think he feels? If this man could talk, what do you think he would say?

How does the sculpture make you feel?

### **Background Information**

In a richly brocaded robe, with rosy cheeks, shining eyes, and outstretched arms, Saint Ginés de la Jara appeals to the faithful standing before him. His gestures and open mouth suggest that he is preaching. There are various legends, both Christian and Islamic, about the life of St. Ginés. According to one legend, he was the son of popular medieval hero Roland (d. A.D. 778) who was the nephew of Charlemagne (A.D. 747-814.) While Ginés and his party were sailing

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across the Mediterranean Sea to make a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, Spain, a great storm broke out. The group decided to wait out the storm on land and they floated to land on Ginés's habit, which became a miraculous boat. On land, Ginés discovered a monastery protected by eight towers. Once there, angels built a shelter where he lived there as a hermit—doing penitence on his knees for twenty-five years. He gave up all royal claims and eventually settled to live a monastic life. Ginés died shortly after and a nephew came to La Jara to pick up his body and return it to France. However, he could not find the body of Ginés. Soon after though, the body reappeared. The legend ends with a series of miracles being attributed to Ginés and finally Pope Paul III declared him a saint in 1541.

Life-sized, devotional objects often included glass eyes and were made out of wood that could be painted in order to achieve lifelike results. Reinforcing the emotional experience of the faithful, such heightened realism typified Spanish Baroque art at a time when the Catholic Church sought to make Christianity more accessible to believers. The technique of decorating a surface in many colors is called *polychromy*. The sculpture of *St. Ginés de la Jara* is a polychrome sculpture in wood. Wood creates a more convincing lifelike sculpture than marble or bronze, which are also typical mediums for sculpture. Luisa Roldán, also called La Roldana, carved the work, and it was polychromed by her brother-in-law, Tomás de los Arcos. De los Arcos used the Spanish technique of *estofado* to replicate the brocaded ecclesiastical garments. In this process, the area for the figure's garment was first covered in gold leaf and painted over with brown tempera paint. When the paint dried, the artist used a stylus to scratch away the paint and reveal the gold underneath, creating the intricate pattern that mimics the brocade textile of the robe. Learn more about *St. Ginés de La Jara* and the technique of *estofado* on the online presentation for the exhibition *La Roldana's Saint Ginés: The Making of a Polychrome Sculpture*: <http://www.getty.edu/art/exhibitions/roldana/>.

### About the Artist

Luisa Roldán (Spanish, 1650–1704)

As court sculptor and the first woman royal sculptor recorded in Spain, Luisa Roldán reached the top of her profession. Her father was a sculptor in Seville, and Luisa and her siblings worked in the family workshop. At twenty-one, she married a sculptor from the shop and became her family's primary source of income, working independently, with her husband as polychromist. Roldán's figures are characterized by clearly delineated profiles, thick locks of hair, billowing draperies, and mystical faces with delicate eyes, knitting brows, rosy cheeks, and slightly parted lips.

From 1686 to 1688 Roldán was in Cádiz, carving wooden sculptures for the cathedral and working on statues for the town council. In 1688 she moved to Madrid to petition for the court sculptor's post, which was granted to her in 1692 and which she retained until her death. Among her creations was a wood *St. Michael*, which her son may have polychromed, as well as many small polychrome terracotta groups that she called "jewels." These were her most distinctive works, and probably unique at the time because groups were made to be appreciated for themselves and did not exist apart from architectural decoration. With their bits of still life, flowers, and animals, they prefigured Rococo porcelain groups